the weekly Standard

JUNE 21, 2010 $4.95

ISRAEL, IRAQ, IRAN, OBAMA—OH MY
ELLIOTT ABRAMS • MARY KATHARINE HAM
JAMIE FLY & WILLIAM KRISTOL

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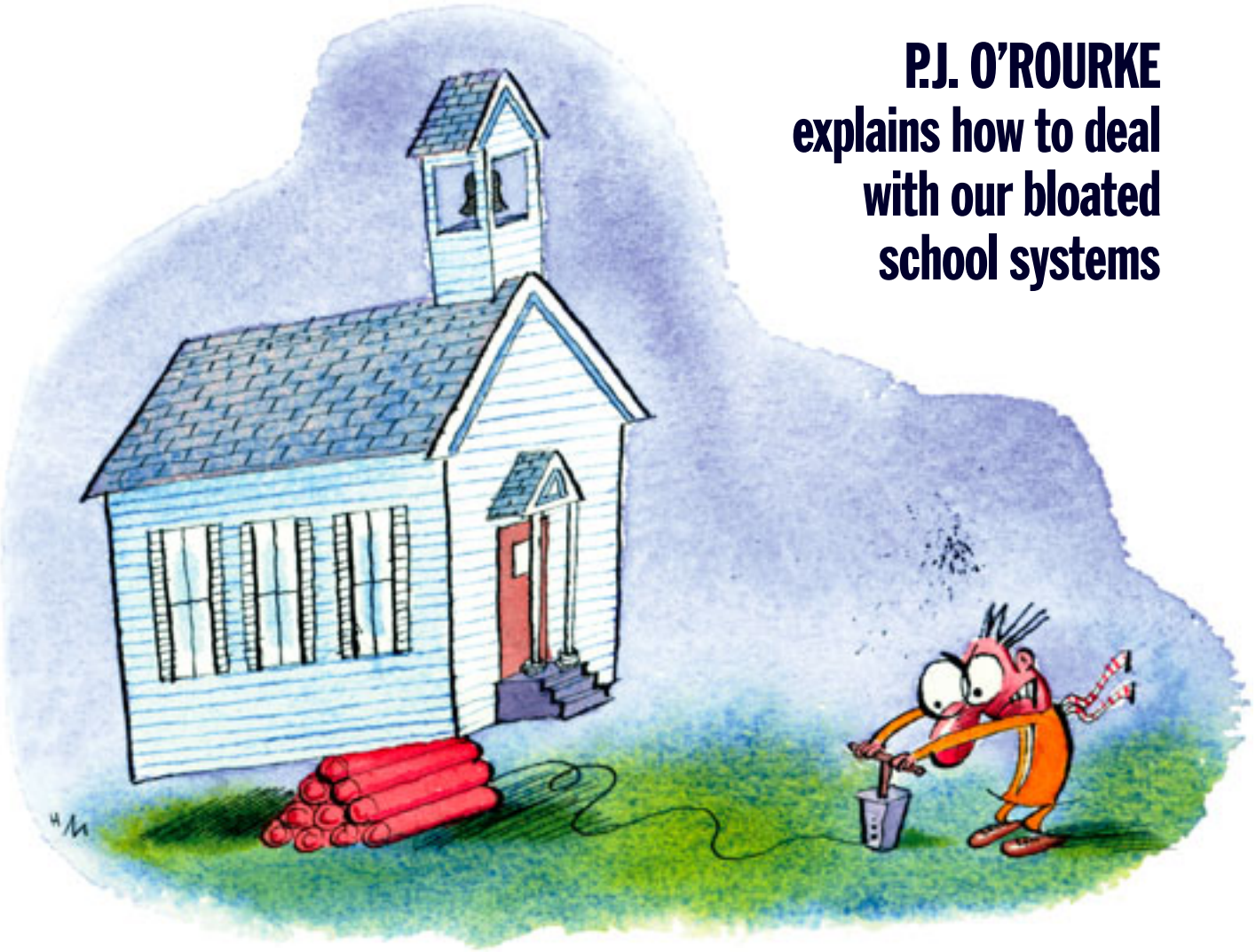

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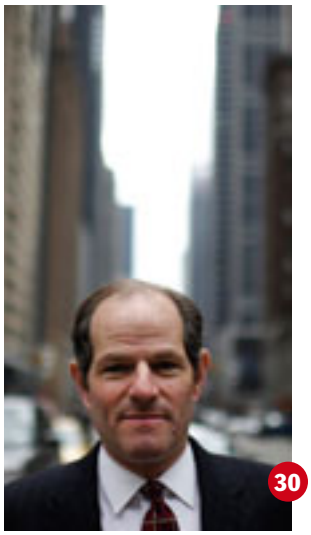
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COVER BY HAL MAYFORTH

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Don't Let the Door Hit You . . .

Not to worry: The Scrapbook is not going to rehearse last week's Helen "Tell Them to Get the Hell Out of Palestine" Thomas saga, since we assume our readers already know the details of Thomas's suggestion that the Jews of Israel relocate en masse to Germany, Poland, or the United States. And her subsequent timely retirement as a Hearst columnist.

Our mission is clarification. Everybody in official and semi-official Washington seems to agree that Helen Thomas's declaration was both grotesque and ill-informed—even insensitive, to use a formulation she would appreciate. But there is also a consensus that her bumptious remarks were some kind of tragic aberration, ending a long, distinguished career on a discordant note. The received wisdom is that 89-year-old Helen Thomas was not only a legendary journalist who asked presidents the tough questions no other White House reporter would ask, but also a trailblazer among women in journalism: the first female member of the Gridiron Club, the first female president of the White House Correspondents' Association, and so on.

Helen Thomas

Well, the received wisdom is nonsense. The fact is that, by the time Helen Thomas showed up in the White House press room in the late 1950s-early 60s, there were innumerable women in Washington journalism (Frances Lewine, May Craig, Pauline Frederick, Sarah McClendon, Mary Lou Forbes, Liz Carpenter, Lee Hall, Nancy Dickerson, Mary McGrory, etc.), reporting, writing columns, appearing on television, asking uncomfortable questions at presidential press conferences. Yes, Thomas was one of the first female members of the National Press Club, as we have repeatedly been reminded; but before the Press Club went co-ed, there was a Women's National Press Club in Washington, with hundreds of members, who voted to dissolve their own organization and join the National Press Club. Helen Thomas went along for the ride.

Nor was she any great shakes as a journalist. Helen Thomas labored as a pool scribe for United Press International which, in the course of her tenure, very nearly became extinct. By the early 1990s, UPI had shrunk to a fragment of its onetime self and was essentially out of the North American market: While Helen Thomas was being showered with Ivy League honorary degrees in recent years, it is entirely likely that her output was never seen in any American newspaper of consequence.

In The Scrapbook's estimation, Helen Thomas's primary characteristic as a journalist was her dogged, some might say pathological, determination to hang on forever. She stayed for decades in the thankless task of tagging around behind presidents long after smarter reporters had moved on to substantive assignments. She did not ask "tough" questions in the press room: From her front-row seat—by grace of seniority, not merit—she made foolish, contentious statements that embarrassed most of her colleagues, and were easily dismissed by a series of White House press secretaries. Even when she quit UPI and began writing an opinion column for Hearst, no one in the press corps had the fortitude to ask what an argumentative columnist was doing among White House correspondents.

Helen Thomas's assertion that the State of Israel should be *Judenrein*—the old Nazi term for a place "cleansed" of Jewish inhabitants—was not an aberration at all, but very much in keeping with longtime convictions and past statements. Helen Thomas was neither a feminist pioneer nor a journalist of weight: She was an arrogant, self-aggrandizing mediocrity whose sole distinction was the inordinate length of her tenure. She will not be missed. ♦

Has 'Rolling Stone' Turned on Obama?

Besides the latest Gallup poll showing the president with a dismal 44 percent approval rating, Barack Obama is now taking friendly fire. We refer to an article by Tim Dickinson in the June 24 issue of *Rolling Stone*: "The Spill, the Scandal, and the President: The inside story of how Obama failed to crack down on the corruption of the Bush years—and let the world's most dangerous oil company get away with murder."

Yes, the piece is written from a paranoid liberal perspective—the Bush administration gets plenty of blame, the Justice Department's criminal probe should have come sooner, and offshore drilling should finally come to an end. That said, Dickinson is merciless in exposing Obama and his staff as utterly incompetent, if not worse.

"It's tempting to believe that the Gulf spill, like so many disasters inherited by Obama, was the fault of the Texas oilman who preceded him in office," writes Dickinson. "But, though George W. Bush paved the way for the catastrophe, it was Obama

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who gave BP the green light to drill."

Dickinson reminds us of Obama's schedule in the early days of the disaster, including a trip to the Grove Park Inn resort and spa. "After returning from his vacation," he writes, "Obama spent Monday, April 26th palling around with Derek Jeter and the New York Yankees, congratulating them on their World Series victory. . . . On Tuesday the 27th, Obama visited a wind-turbine plant in Iowa. Wednesday the 28th, he toured a biofuels refinery in Missouri and talked up financial reform in Quincy, Illinois. He didn't mention the oil spill or the Gulf."

Even when the administration did try to get its act together, its haplessness was exposed: "The White House press office organized a show of overwhelming force, with Gibbs convening Browner, Napolitano, Deputy Interior Secretary David Hayes, EPA chief Lisa Jackson and Coast Guard Rear Adm. Sally Brice-O'Hara for a single press conference on April 29th. Though clearly meant to signal engagement, the all-star crew didn't have their message straight. When Brice-O'Hara praised 'the professionalism of our partner, BP,' Napolitano quickly barked, 'They are not our partner! They are not our partner!' For her part, Napolitano revealed that she didn't know whether the Defense Department possessed any assets that could help contain the spill, and referred vaguely to 'whatever methodologies' BP was using to seal the well."

But wait, there's more: "From the start, the administration has seemed intent on allowing BP to operate in near-total secrecy. . . . [T]he Obama administration has instead attacked scientists who released independent estimates of the spill. . . . Scientists were stunned that NOAA, an agency widely respected for its scientific integrity, appeared to have been co-opted by the White House spin machine." And on and on it goes.

It seems like only yesterday that *Rolling Stone* had Barack Obama looking saintly on its cover. Reading this essay, will the president wonder, "If I've lost *Rolling Stone*, I've lost . . . " ♦

The Not-So-Greasy Pole (cont.)

Citing safety concerns, the superintendent of the Naval Academy, Vice Admiral Jeffrey Fowler, last month deep-sixed a longstanding tradition in which the plebes cap their first year by ascending a well-greased obelisk, the Herndon Monument. Our item two weeks ago recounting the sad demise of the greased pole climb provoked several outraged responses. Paul Withington, CDR USNR (Ret.) and father of an Annapolis '10 grad and a West Point '12 cadet, spoke for many in this letter to The Scrapbook:

> If the Naval Academy were truly interested in the well-being of the midshipmen they'd do away with the Color Parade, an annual event recognizing the best performing company (130 midshipmen) of the semester. Wearing long sleeved, wool tunics with two rows of gold buttons and a tight collar, this year's brigade marched out in the late May blazing sun and high humidity and they started fainting. The corpsmen had them laid out in the shade at the edge of the parade field for all the world looking as if they were battle casualties. Dozens went down this year.
>
> Or perhaps the Academy should eliminate "Sea Trials," a long morning of things like mud crawling, paddling rafts in combat gear, and swimming in camos in the Severn River (at a time of year when the river is still quite cold). Some midshipmen get injured during this event, not infrequently more than during the Herndon climb.
>
> Personally, I think they should keep greasing the monument and continue with Sea Trials and Color Parade. Perhaps the real change needed is to replace the vice admiral USN [superintendent] with a lieutenant general USMC. ♦

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Rant of the Week

Barack "whose ass to kick" Obama ticked off Steve Czaban, THE SCRAPBOOK's favorite sports talk radio host, who let loose at czabe.com:

> Our president can only do so much. He's not Aquaman. But not having run a country myself, here is what I think I would have done in Week 1.
>
> a. Tell my staff to bring me the 5 most expert, independent deep sea oil drilling engineers.
>
> b. Tell the CEO of BP to get his ass to 1600 Pennsylvania Ave ASAP.
>
> c. Have one big . . . meeting in which, I, as president, make sure to remind everybody around the table: "Look, don't bullshit me!"
>
> Take all of the info you gather, and get a plan. Don't piss off BP, because you now need their ass to help you fix this. But don't coddle them either.
>
> So why then, didn't our country's CEO . . . decide to meet with BP's CEO for something this basic?
>
> Oh, because our Teleprompter King was too "smart" for that ol' ploy.
>
> "My experience is when you talk to a guy like a BP CEO, he's going to say all the right things to me. I'm not interested in words. I'm interested in actions."
>
> REACT: Oh, your "experience"? Your experience at, what, exactly? Community organizing? . . . The same guy who wants to have dialogue with foreign dictators suddenly doesn't think a meeting with the CEO of BP will be productive as the entire Gulf of Mexico turns into a fudge sundae.
>
> You know who would have been a real ace of an asset in the White House right now?
>
> A vice president with executive experience, from the state with the most oil production in the country.
>
> Oh, wait. Never mind. . . . She's stupid, and Barry's smart, or at least that's what one sportswriter I know argued with me during the election. A sportswriter whose big resume item is ghostwriting a book with Shaq. He was beyond certain that becoming governor of Alaska—and running the state—took virtually no brains, but that covering the NBA made him an intellectual. Whatever.
>
> I shudder to think what Barry will be like when a real crisis emerges. Something a little more complicated, fast moving, and difficult than a big oil zit on the ocean floor. I hope we never have to find out. ♦

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Not Your Father's Washington

When I returned to Washington in 1992 after a 13-year absence, I was frequently asked what changes I observed. Of course, the obvious answer was volume: Big buildings had appeared where humble shops once stood, and automobile traffic seemed considerably more congested. Cross-town excursions that had once taken 15 minutes now seemed to require three-quarters of an hour.

My actual answer, however, was rather different: What struck me, in the waning days of the George H.W. Bush administration, was the increase in what might be called police presence. In addition to the hapless Metropolitan Police, there were now innumerable uniformed agencies—Secret Service, Park Service, Executive Protection Service, etc.—that patrolled around the White House and Capitol and cruised the downtown streets in conspicuous numbers. In subsequent years, this has only gotten worse. Federal buildings are now routinely surrounded by concrete barriers; you can't walk into the Government Accountability Office without passing through a phalanx of sullen cops and metal detectors.

This is some considerable distance from the Washington of my youth, where only the president—not even the vice president—merited Secret Service protection, and Harry Truman could take his morning constitutional around the block, two detectives hovering discreetly in the background. In the 1950s, I took piano lessons in a studio over the Avalon Theatre where, on occasion, Mrs. Richard M. Nixon would pull up on a Friday afternoon, park her station wagon by the curb, push a coin into the meter, and escort Tricia and Julie into the movies. There was no "security" in sight.

I thought of this the other day when the Afghan president, Hamid Karzai, and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton spent a few hours at the U.S. Institute for Peace. The institute happens to be located in a building across M Street from our offices; standing at my window, I enjoyed a ringside seat. About a half-hour before the two dignitaries arrived the police had cut off all traffic for two blocks moving in all directions—this is a busy downtown neighborhood; I can only imagine the consequences. Finally, with sirens screaming and motorcycles roaring, a 17-car entourage of black vans, light armored vehicles, motorcycles, and an ambulance converged on the intersection of M and 17th Streets.

ROB ULLMAN

There they stayed for the next few hours. Those storied grim-faced men in dark suits, earpieces, and sunglasses (you see them a lot in television dramas) would occasionally bellow at pedestrians strolling too close to the curb, or point menacingly at people who wished to cross the street at the light. In due course, the secretary and her guest left the institute, and the great swarm of security broke camp for the State Department, cutting off traffic between downtown and Foggy Bottom, sirens at full volume, lights flashing.

I suppose there is an argument, in our venerable republic, for this kind of treatment for elected politicians: God knows I wish none any harm, and, the Obama administration notwithstanding, we're still in the war on terror. Nevertheless, these bumptious displays of police-state behavior are a routine feature in the life of the nation's capital: You get stopped on the sidewalk and ordered back several paces, to allow a visiting foreign minister, or the secretary of housing and urban development, to proceed from a hotel doorway to a waiting limousine. The other evening I was prevented from crossing Lafayette Square to walk to dinner—something I have done for decades. No explanation was given, and I dared not inquire. At the Capitol, where guards patrol a widening perimeter, there is a bunker-like quality to new protective construction.

The problem, in my view, is the subtle antidemocratic message. These spectacles inspire not awe and gratitude but resentment and estrangement. In 1901, when three presidents had been shot to death in the previous 36 years, it did not occur to Theodore Roosevelt to turn the White House into a fortress and treat citizens as a daily menace. In 1941, when we were at war with the greatest tyranny of the age, Franklin Roosevelt placed one armed soldier at each White House gate.

And yet, with each new Secret Service-sanctioned level of "security" in our day, the insecurity of official Washington seems to grow. I don't know whether Hamid Karzai and Hillary Clinton were in peril at the U.S. Institute for Peace, but it was obvious, on the basis of behavior and demeanor, that their guards seemed to think that the danger was demonstrable from passing tourists, bicycle messengers, and the local office workers on their way to lunch.

Philip Terzian

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the weekly Standard

A Period of Consequences

The passage last Wednesday of a fourth U.N. Security Council resolution imposing sanctions on Iran was the latest act in the tragicomedy that is U.S. policy toward Iran.

Administrations of both parties have pursued the same failed policy for the last several years. Even while successive rounds of sanctions against Tehran have been threatened and engagement tried, the Iranian regime has made steady progress towards a nuclear arsenal, supported terrorist groups, and assisted those fighting American troops in Iraq and Afghanistan—all without serious repercussion.

Although President Bush spoke during his second term about "keeping the military option on the table," it became apparent to Tehran that, distracted by other issues, Washington would not back up its words with actions. Now the Obama administration has virtually given up even referring to the use of force—except when administration officials warn of the supposed catastrophic consequences of any military attack against Iran's nuclear facilities. Indeed, the Obama administration seems much more taken with the urgency of blocking an Israeli strike against Iran's nuclear program than with stopping Iran's nuclear program. And one routinely hears how very, very dangerous any use of military force against Iran would be.

Winston Churchill

NEWSCOM

Would it be so dangerous? That is a debate the country needs to have, publicly and frankly, before it's too late.

Critics of military action against Iran argue that it would open up a third front for American forces in the Middle East. Our troops would be at risk from Iranian missiles. Iran would block the Strait of Hormuz (causing oil prices to skyrocket) and use its terrorist proxies Hamas and Hezbollah to carry out attacks well beyond the Middle East, including perhaps on the U.S. homeland.

Yet if we carried out a targeted campaign against Iran's nuclear facilities, against sites used to train and equip militants killing American soldiers, and against certain targeted terror-supporting and nuclear-enabling regime elements, the effects are just as likely to be limited.

It's unclear, for example, that Iran would want to risk broadening the conflict and creating the prospect of regime decapitation. Iran's rulers have shown that their preeminent concern is maintaining their grip on power. If U.S. military action is narrowly targeted, and declared to be such, why would Iran's leaders, already under pressure at home, want to escalate the conflict, as even one missile attack on a U.S. facility or ally or a blockade of the Strait would obviously do?

Some in Washington seem resigned to letting Israel take action. But a U.S. failure to act in response to what is perhaps the greatest threat to American interests in decades would be irresponsible. Israel, moreover, lacks our full capabilities to do the job.

Despite our global commitments and our engagement in two ongoing wars, the U.S. military is fully able to carry out such a mission. Indeed, the success of President Bush's 2007 surge of forces into Iraq and of President Obama's sending additional resources to Afghanistan means we are on better footing to deal with Iran's nuclear program than we were a few years ago.

Obviously, the best alternative in Iran is regime change brought about by domestic opposition. Unfortunately, President Obama waffled while innocent Iranians were killed by their own government a year ago after the fraudulent elections. To this day, he has done little to support the forces of freedom in Iran.

It's now increasingly clear that the credible threat of a military strike against Iran's nuclear program is the only action that could convince the regime to curtail its ambitions. But instead of using the possibility of military action as leverage, the Obama administration has tried to soothe the mullahs' nerves. It's time to put Tehran on edge.

In a speech to the House of Commons in late 1936, Winston Churchill warned, "The era of procrastination, of half-measures, of soothing and baffling expedients, of delays is coming to its close. In its place we are entering a period of consequences."

We, too, are entering such a period. We can act and make the world safer. Or we, and the rest of the free world, can choose to be the hapless victim of choices made by our enemies. For doing nothing in the face of danger, wishful procrastinating, and fearful delay are also choices—dangerous and dishonorable ones.

—Jamie Fly & William Kristol

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A Turkey of a Policy

Obama makes the Middle East an even more dangerous place.

BY ELLIOTT ABRAMS

JASON SEILER

The Gaza flotilla incident is not over. American demands for some "international role" in investigating Israel's conduct (but not, it seems, Turkey's) and for a new system of getting humanitarian aid to Gaza will be imposed on Israel one way or another before the episode will be behind us. But however they play out, this incident clarified several major trends in the region—all of which are dangerous for the United States and for our allies in the Middle East.

Elliott Abrams, senior fellow for the Middle East at the Council on Foreign Relations, was a deputy national security adviser in the George W. Bush administration.

First, it's obvious that our formerly reliable NATO ally Turkey has become a staunch supporter of the radical camp. In the flotilla incident, it not only sided with but also sought to strengthen the terrorist group Hamas—a group that is anathema not just to the United States and Israel, but to the governments of Jordan and Egypt. The recent photo of Turkish prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan with Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Bashar Assad in Damascus is an emblem of this change, and Turkey's work to undermine U.N. sanctions against Iran shows its substance. Turkey's U.N. Security Council vote against the newest round of sanctions this past week put it in Iran's camp against Europe, the United States, Russia, and China. That's quite a realignment for a NATO ally.

Perhaps even worse is Turkey's push to turn the Israeli-Palestinian conflict into a religious war. A column in the leading Istanbul newspaper *Hurriyet* well described the new Turkey:

> As for the images from Turkey that were reflected across the globe following last week's incident, it was a purely Islamic one, with headscarved and turbaned protestors chanting Islamic slogans under Islamic banners, and invoking the name of Allah for days on end in front of Israeli missions in this country.

Turkey's solidarity with Hamas is not, of course, based on Arab nationalism, which as a non-Arab nation it does not support. It is instead based on a definition of the Mideast conflict as one between Jews and Muslims, precisely the position of Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda. Needless to say, if the Arab-Israeli conflict is about interstate disputes and the need to resolve the future of the West Bank and Gaza, it can be solved; if it is a religious conflict, nothing but violence is ahead.

Second, the Arabs are once again becoming objects, not actors, in history. The anchors of the Arab consensus have long been Egypt and Saudi Arabia, and both are now weakened forces in Arab politics and diplomacy. In part this is a story of old age: While for decades Mubarak was the key Arab leader, and the Saudis for 35 years counted on their foreign minister, Saud al-Faisal, both men are now in a steady decline. Few observers expect Mubarak to live more

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than another year or two, and he may not make it to Egypt's 2011 presidential elections. Saud suffers from Parkinson's and has repeatedly asked to leave his post. States act in politics through the medium of men: at best, men who have prestige, persuasive powers, and whom it is thought dangerous to cross. Twenty years ago Saud and Mubarak were both such men, but that time is past. Nor can they easily be replaced: Saud has no understudy, unless it is his feckless brother Turki, who failed so badly as ambassador to Washington that he lasted but 17 months here. Whoever replaces Mubarak will spend years solidifying (or perhaps failing to solidify) the regime.

Looking at the broad sweep of history such personnel matters can be deprecated, but that would be a mistake. Mubarak has been a critical factor at Arab summits for three decades, and American efforts to resist radical moves (by Qaddafi, the Syrians, and of course Saddam Hussein) depended substantially on him and his desire to protect Egypt's peace treaty with Israel. Similarly, anyone who has worked with Arab diplomats knows that they almost instinctively ask "Where are the Saudis on this?" and "Where are the Egyptians?" whenever asked to support an American position. But today Qatar, with 225,000 citizens, has at least as much influence in Arab councils as Egypt with 80 million or Saudi Arabia with 30 million, and Qatar's 51-year-old foreign minister has clout that would simply have been impossible 10 or 20 years ago. Erdogan and the Turkish foreign minister, Ahmet Davutoglu, further demonstrate how much damage clever, unprincipled, energetic actors can wreak when unopposed by more responsible officials of equal force.

So the Arab core grows hollow and less and less able to defend its interests against supporters of Islamism. Worse yet for the Arabs, peripheral powers are coming once again to dominate their region: The Turks and Persians are rising forces and, with Israel, are now by far the dominant states in the Middle East. History may someday record that the Arab awakening that began with the Arab revolt of 1916 against the Ottomans ended about a century later with a whimper.

Third, while it is no secret that the United States is increasingly viewed as a spent force and an unreliable ally in this region, it is not so much the events of the past 17 months that impress Middle Easterners as it is that the Obama administration remains oblivious to the impact of its policies. Everyone there sees clearly that Obama desires to be out of Iraq more than he desires to stabilize that country. Since a strong Iraq would be a force of resistance to Iran, this policy suggests that the rise of Iran will be unchecked by America. So does our policy on Iran's nuclear program, where the fantasy that U.N. sanctions will solve the problem persuades no Arab or Israeli official. So does our distancing ourselves from Israel, which all understand is a deliberate policy. If America does not plan to stand up to Iran or help Israel do so, Iran will acquire nuclear weapons and its desired preeminence will only grow. Those who wish to survive will accommodate, whatever their private views; they will not stand up to a Turkish-Iranian alliance without strong, decisive American leadership.

This is not, of course, how the Obama administration sees the region, or the world. From the Cairo speech to the National Security Strategy, the president has described a very different international situation: The United States has but one enemy, al Qaeda, and for the rest we must not be "defined by our differences." The National Security Strategy that refers to "21st century centers of influence—including China, India, and Russia" as if these powers were in similar relationships with the United States is clearly devoid of any sense of the difference between allies and adversaries. In fact, it is not a "strategy" at all, but merely a listing of desirable outcomes for the United States.

The Gaza flotilla incident might have been a great setback to the radical camp had the United States reacted sharply, defending Israel, condemning the jihadists on board and their sponsors in Turkey, blocking U.N. Security Council action, and refusing to sponsor another international inquiry that will condemn Israel. And Israel's interests were not the only ones at stake: The blockade of Gaza is a joint Israeli-Egyptian action to weaken Hamas. But the American position reflects the Obama line: carefully balancing the interests of friend and foe, seeking to avoid offense to our enemies, or, as Churchill famously described British policy in the 1930s, "resolved to be irresolute." Middle Eastern states, including Arab regimes traditionally allied with the United States, view this pose as likely to get them all killed when enemies come knocking at the door.

Still, whatever the trends and whatever the American errors, nothing is inevitable except the passing of certain key actors. Turks may tire of Erdogan's speeches and return a government that seeks a true balance between East and West rather than a headlong dive into alliances with Iran and Syria. Iran's nuclear program may be stopped by an Israeli action, or some day by the collapse of that increasingly despised regime. Israelis and Palestinians may find a way to a better modus vivendi through pragmatic actions that improve Palestinian life, expand self-rule, and reduce the Israeli presence in the West Bank. The sad and dangerous thing for all moderates in the region, from Lebanese who fear growing Syrian influence to Saudis, Kuwaitis, Emiratis, and Bahrainis who fear Iranian domination of the Gulf to Palestinians who fear Hamas, is that such desirable outcomes are far less likely now. Ironically, a "moderate" America seeking diplomatic "engagement" and military disengagement, seeking to avoid trouble and to palliate radical forces, does not produce moderation in the Middle East; America the fierce and certain ally gives moderates strength and radicals pause.

The bloody battle on board the *Marmara* lasted only half an hour, but larger and bloodier battles lie ahead unless the United States reasserts its role in the region. The vacuum our weakness creates will be filled by forces hostile to our interests, our allies, and our beliefs. In the end they'll have to be beaten; the only question is the timing—and the cost. ♦

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How to Think About Oil Spills

The perils of overreaction.

BY STEVEN F. HAYWARD

This article needs to begin with a big mea culpa. In the April 26 edition of THE WEEKLY STANDARD (which went to press on April 16), I wrote: "Improvements in drilling technology have greatly reduced the risk of the kind of offshore spill that occurred off Santa Barbara in 1969. . . . To fear oil spills from offshore rigs is analogous to fearing air travel now because of prop plane crashes in the 1950s." On April 20, the Deepwater Horizon platform exploded, touching off the worst oil spill in American history.

Ouch. I've understandably been receiving indignant emails from environmentalists wondering whether I care to opine about the seaworthiness of the *Titanic* while I'm at it. The basic point was nonetheless correct. While we still don't know the precise cause of the failure of the blowout preventer on the Deepwater Horizon (a technology that has successfully prevented spills in more than 150 offshore drilling accidents over the last 40 years), early accounts suggest that the same factors that cause most airplane crashes came into play: complacency and sloppy maintenance.

Environmentalists have been quick to call the BP/Deepwater spill the offshore drilling equivalent of Three Mile Island, the 1979 nuclear accident that put the last nail in the coffin of the already declining nuclear power industry. The comparison with Three Mile Island is ironically appropriate. As some environmentalists have come to regret, the limitation of nuclear power after 1979 resulted in the expansion of coal-fired electricity instead, but coal is now environmental enemy number one because of its high greenhouse gas emissions. A halt to offshore drilling now would be equally ill-advised.

As with Three Mile Island, the hysteria of the media and the political class over the Deepwater spill is likely to lead to increased risk and adverse environmental tradeoffs. It is understandable that the Deepwater spill is generating such intense fury. The 24/7 "spillcam" is giving a whole new meaning to "live-streaming video," and unlike tanker spills, which are bounded by the contents of the tanker, the open-ended nature of an offshore platform spill generates more dread. Even with the semi-successful effort to begin capturing some of the leaking oil, the Deepwater spill will probably persist until relief wells can be finished possibly in August. By then the Deepwater spill will likely have leaked over 200,000 tons of oil into the Gulf of Mexico. By comparison, the *Exxon Valdez* tanker spilled 37,000 tons into Alaska's Prince William Sound; the 1969 Santa Barbara spill (which was stopped in about 10 days) amounted to only 12,000 tons.

But the extraordinary nature of this platform spill—the first in this country in 40 years (last year's *Montara* spill in the Timor Sea was the first major platform spill anywhere in the world in more than 20 years)—is no excuse to take leave of reason, or avert our gaze from thinking seriously about risk tradeoffs. Right now the United States gets more than 1.6 million barrels of oil a day from the Gulf of Mexico, and if we curtail Gulf exploration and production, we shall have to make up the difference with more imported oil.

Despite post-*Exxon Valdez* safety measures, tanker oil spills occur more frequently and release more oil than offshore drilling accidents, by a wide margin. Over the last 50 years, offshore drilling spills, including the Deepwater Horizon, have unleashed a little more than 1 million tons of oil; tanker accidents have spilled 4 million. For every offshore drilling spill, there have been seven tanker spills, many much larger than the *Exxon Valdez*, only the 40th largest tanker spill on record.

Even if the Deepwater Horizon spill lasts into the fall, it will still not even be the largest offshore spill in the Gulf of Mexico. That dubious achievement belongs to the *Ixtoc 1*, a Mexican platform near Yucatán that blew out in 1979 in circumstances similar to the Deepwater Horizon (the blowout preventer failed after a gas surge from the well). It took Mexico's famously inept Pemex almost 10 months to stop the leak, by which time 460,000 tons of oil had leaked—still the largest accidental spill in world history (Saddam Hussein deliberately fouled the Persian Gulf at the end of the first Gulf War with 1.2 million tons).

The *Ixtoc 1* spill started in June 1979. Oil began washing up on 125 miles of Texas coastline by early August. It is estimated that only 4,000 tons of oil made it to U.S. shores, which was about 1 percent of the total amount of oil spilled. About 30,000 tons was estimated to have reached Mexican shorelines. Pemex, by the way, refused to pay damages to the United States, citing sovereign immunity—an important contrast to the stance taken in the Deepwater spill by BP, which is assuming full responsibility (as it should).

The ecological effects of the *Ixtoc 1* disaster should be borne in mind when we hear claims that the Deepwater spill will inflict large and long-lasting effects. According to a 1981 study by the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences, about half of the

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Ixtoc 1 oil evaporated, and another 25 percent sank to the bottom of the ocean, much of it broken up by wave action and chemical dispersants. The Swedish Academy study estimated that oil from the *Ixtoc 1* poisoned a 5,800 square mile area, devastating crab, shrimp, and fish stocks, and leading to large oxygen-killing plankton blooms. Overall fish landings fell by up to 70 percent in Mexican and Texan coastal waters. On the other hand, the 5,800 square mile area represented about 2.5 percent of Mexican Gulf Coast waters. Finally and most ironically, Hurricane Frederick struck the Texas coast in September 1979, and washed away 95 percent of the oil that had reached shoreline beaches and marshes. The current fears of the effects of tropical storms and hurricanes in the midst of the Deepwater spill might be misplaced.

It will be some time before we have a precise idea of the nature and extent of environmental damage from the Deepwater spill. It should be borne in mind, however, that ocean ecosystems tend to have faster recovery times than ecosystems on land, owing to the area available for the dilution and dispersal of the oil droplets, the constant aerating turbulence of ocean waters, and the ease of repopulation from adjacent areas once the anoxia (lack of oxygen) has passed.

A recent study of seven basic ecosystem types, and their most typical perturbations, found that of ecosystems that make a recovery from various catastrophic events (and, it must be noted, not all do), ocean ecosystems disrupted by oil spills were the fastest to recover, often within a span of one to four years. As the *New York Times* noted in a 1993 story, the Persian Gulf recovered surprisingly faster than anticipated from the 1.2 million ton spill Saddam Hussein engineered in 1991: "The vast amount of oil that Iraqi occupation forces in Kuwait dumped into the Persian Gulf during the 1991 war did little long-term damage, international researchers say." By contrast, forest lands disrupted by fire or deforestation can take more than 40 years to recover.

Besides increasing our reliance on tankers, there are two other reasons curtailing offshore production in the Gulf may not reduce the ecological risk to the Gulf Coast. First, other nations are unlikely to curtail their own offshore exploration in the Gulf. Cuba is drilling for oil within 100 miles of south Florida; Mexico has extensive drilling operations in the Gulf (and as mentioned above caused the largest single spill in history). Both Venezuela and Brazil are expanding their offshore exploration and production in deep water, and are likely to expand to the Gulf of Mexico if the United States scales back.

Even if the costs of the spill exceed $15 billion, as now seems likely, the benefits of continued offshore oil production still exceed the costs by a wide margin. Economist Peter Passell estimates a net benefit of nearly a trillion dollars from continued offshore production.

Second, while the Deepwater Horizon spill represents an acute short term shock to Gulf waters and the Gulf Coast, the chronic seasonal depletion of oxygen in the Gulf (aka the 8,500 square mile "dead zone" below the Mississippi River Delta) may be aggravated by one of the policy responses that has been suggested in the aftermath of the Deepwater Horizon: increased ethanol production. The Nebraska Corn Growers Association has been especially enthusiastic, offering several tweets such as "Offshore oil drilling far from fail safe. The spill will boost the appeal of renewable energy, such as ethanol. . . . There is a fuel option that doesn't result in oil spills in the ocean. It's known as ethanol. . . . When was the last time you saw a headline for an ethanol spill in the ocean?"

Actually, it is possible to point to an ethanol-related environmental calamity in the Gulf *every year*. Hypoxia—oxygen depletion—in the Gulf fluctuates from year to year depending on a range of variables, but over the long term has gotten worse. A major contributor to this trend is dissolved inorganic nitrogen runoff from the Mississippi River basin, basically surplus fertilizer, which will increase with additional ethanol production.

A 2008 study published by the National Academy of Sciences observed that "nitrogen leaching from fertilized corn fields to the Mississippi-Atchafalaya River system is a primary cause of the bottom-water hypoxia that develops on the continental shelf of the northern Gulf of Mexico each summer." The study concluded that our current ethanol production goals will increase dissolved inorganic nitrogen flowing into the Gulf by as much as 34 percent, and could make it impossible to achieve federal targets for reducing Gulf hypoxia: "Expanding corn-based ethanol production would make the already difficult challenges of reducing nitrogen export to the Gulf of Mexico and the extent of hypoxia practically impossible without large shifts in food production and agricultural management."

In short, there is considerable risk that overreaction to the BP/Deepwater spill will have second-order environmental impacts that could be cumulatively worse than the spill itself, both for the Gulf and for other environmental arenas. Even if the costs of the spill exceed $15 billion (to be borne by BP) as now seems likely, the benefits of continued offshore oil production still exceed the costs by a wide margin. Economist Peter Passell estimates a net economic benefit of nearly a trillion dollars from continued offshore production. This will not be a popular position to hold so long as live streaming video of the oil spill continues and the media continue to cover the spill in a state of near hysteria. But it is at precisely such times that rational analysis needs to be heard. ♦

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Scapegoating les Anglo-Saxons

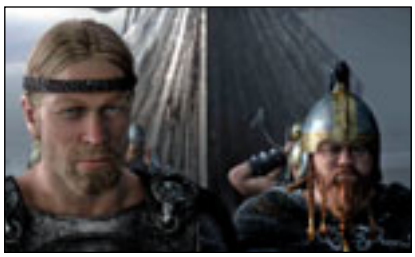
EU poobahs take aim at Wall Street and the City.

BY ANDREW STUTTAFORD

When America's flimsier corporate colossi threaten to collapse, they tend to follow a wearyingly familiar script. Quarterly reports "disappoint," the media begin to stir, and questionable financial dealings come to light. The CEO then emerges from his bunker to announce that all would be well but for the (vicious/ill-informed) press, (greedy/destructive) short-sellers, or both. Then all hell breaks loose. That's how it was with Enron. That's how it was with Lehman Brothers.

And that, more or less, is how it's going with the euro. A dangerous gamble with other people's money, irresponsibly operated, and dishonestly sold, the European single currency has been showing signs of severe stress, and leading EU officials have been doing just what the Ken Lays of this world do: dodge.

There have been the "all is wells" from the likes of José Manuel Barroso, president of the EU commission—the man who boasted in February that the euro was "a protective shield" against the crisis. There have been the attacks on the press—often with an interesting twist. Spain's transport minister, José Blanco, for instance: "None of what is happening including editorials in some foreign media with their apocalyptic commentaries, is happening by chance, or innocently. It is the result of certain special interests." Just who were those unnamed "special interests"? (Clue: Europeans traditionally believed that they wore Stetsons or bowler hats.) The Spanish prime minister reportedly ordered his country's National Intelligence Center—the Inquisition no longer being available—to investigate. An alternative theory was conjured up at around the same time by Jürgen Stark, the European Central Bank's chief economist. Asked by *Der Spiegel* whether he suspected that the "Anglo-American" media were "behind the attacks" on the euro, Stark replied that "much of what they are printing reads as if they were trying to deflect attention away from the problems in their own backyards." That's a nice try, but it's also an answer of staggering disingenuousness. Can Stark really have been unaware of the long-running media furor in Britain and the United States over their domestic deficit disasters?



Who, us?

To be fair, the head of the ECB, Jean-Claude Trichet, did warn in May that "one should be wary" of talk of Anglo-Saxon conspiracies, but by then plenty of farfetched plots had been dreamt up. Were those "apocalyptic commentaries," for example, an ideological assault by diehard euroskeptics or were they, perhaps, part of a dastardly scheme to preserve the U.S. dollar's position as the ultimate reserve currency? As conspiracy theories go, neither was bad, but such theories play even better when seasoned with a "speculator" or two. Maybe, the Anglo-Saxon media were in cahoots with Anglo-Saxon plutocrats looking to make a sleazy buck out of a sickly euro. By talking up the crisis, were these hacks simultaneously peddling a sexy story and filling the coffers of Wall Street and the City of London? *Quelle horreur.*

That there might actually be a crisis to talk about was only grudgingly conceded, and its true cause remained the stuff of denial. Far easier to blame the sons and daughters of Gordon Gekko. It was in this vein that Ireland's minister of state for finance, Martin Mansergh, claimed last month to have gotten to the bottom of the market's distaste for the euro: "If you had lots of separate currencies that would be more profits for the financial sector." Let no one say that blarney is dead.

Wiser blamesayers have avoided conspiracy theories and stuck to abuse. Anders Borg, finance minister in Sweden's (vaguely) right-of-center, (not so vaguely) Europhile government, grabbed headlines in May comparing market players to a "wolf pack." The jibe might have had more weight had it not come from someone who had, just a few months before, sternly intoned that there was "no legal basis" for an EU bailout of Greece, exactly the sort of ill-starred comment that is now food for the wolf pack.

As zoological insults go, however, Borg's lupine sneer was one of the best since the moment in 2005 when Franz Müntefering, then chairman of Germany's Social Democratic party, compared foreign hedge funds and private equity groups to "locusts." Yes, those investors had been buyers rather than sellers back then, but they had been the wrong sorts of buyers (short-term, asset-strippers, foreign).

To his credit, Müntefering spoke out when the times were good. Many of those now criticizing "speculators" held their peace when those wicked markets were betting on the "convergence plays" that kept interest rates down (and pushed asset prices up) in the countries now known as the PIIGS (Portugal, Ireland, Italy, Greece, and Spain).

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But it was never more than an uneasy peace. The scapegoating of Wall Street and the City may be a diversionary tactic but there is nothing fake about the animus that lies behind it. The great majority of the EU's political class disdains the Anglo-Saxon market capitalism that is, in its disorderliness, brutal competitiveness, and unembarrassed pursuit of profit, the product of an economic and political tradition that is the antithesis of its own. Americans expect that sort of thinking on Europe's left, but it's present on the continent's right too. Outside the U.K., the dominant strain of thinking amongst the EU's establishment right is in the Christian Democratic tradition. Its origins lie in Roman Catholicism—a creed never entirely comfortable with the free market. The mixed "Rhineland" model of capitalism is its model and "solidarity" its lodestar. For a very French example of this thinking, check out Nicolas Sarkozy's *Testimony* (2006), where the future president attacked "stock market capitalism" and "speculators and predators." (Note the date: Sarkozy was not one of those who kept quiet when times seemed to be good.)

Thus the rejection of the Wall Street way by European elites is philosophical and aesthetic as much as it is party political. Its roots are deep and its expression, sometimes, ugly. In November 1942, a French official wrote a piece for a pro-Vichy magazine (interestingly, the same issue features an article by one of the future architects of the euro, François Mitterrand) bemoaning those who would live "free" (his scare quotes) in the "soft, comfortable mud of Anglo-Saxon materialism."

The "Anglo-Saxon" other (the Vichy crowd liked to throw in the Jews, as well) is a convenient target for European leaders looking for someone, anyone—other than themselves—to blame for the current shambles. But this is a scapegoat that the EU's mandarins are also riding in pursuit of two long-standing objectives: crippling the City of London and, so far as possible, keeping Wall Street out of Brussels's domain. Less than two weeks after the implosion of Lehman, Sarkozy announced that *laissez-faire* was "finished." Wholesale reform of the global financial system was, he pronounced, essential.

Few would deny that some reform is needed. It's even possible to assemble a respectable defense of the "anti-speculative" measures (such as certain restrictions on short-selling), if not their confidence-killing timing, recently put into place by German chancellor Angela Merkel. But look more closely at the underpinnings of Merkel's actions and the picture darkens. The new measures can then be seen not as well-intentioned reform, but as the next step in Merkel's populist crusade against the "perfidy" of international "speculators," a crusade designed to mask the extent to which the current crisis (and the bill to German taxpayers) was brought on by the speculative scrip—the euro—that Germany's politicians had forced upon their voters.

The fact that "speculators" have had little to do with the convulsions now shaking the eurozone means nothing to Merkel. It's far easier to talk to the electorate about a "battle of the politicians against the markets"—a not unfamiliar tune to U.S. voters—than admit that the real battle that she has been fighting is against what remains of the political, democratic, and financial integrity of the European nation-state.

And we can be sure that the EU elite will continue to stand alongside Merkel in combating the bogeyman bankers, a wag-the-dog war that dovetails nicely both with short-term expediency and long-term belief, and is designed to cut the financial sector—specifically the Anglo-American financial sector—down to size. That doesn't mean the death of the local big banks that have for so long been a part of the European financial landscape, but it does mean that their business will be reined in. They will see a return to the far tighter political control of the past with all the potential for abuse that can bring. Significantly higher taxes lie in their future, although increasing worries over the fragile state of many EU banks (not least because of their exposure to the PIIGS' debt) may stymie such plans for now. The bonus culture will come under additional pressure (not all Americans will mourn that), and efforts will be made to ensure that the markets are just that bit friendlier to entrenched interests—such as those of governments that borrow too much. The news last week that France is falling in with Merkel's recent initiatives and that both countries would like to see them extended across the EU, is an early indication of what is to come.

Much of this is bound to affect the business carried out by Anglo-American finance in Europe, but it is not directly protectionist. The same cannot be said of Brussels's Alternative Investment Fund Managers Directive, a rough beast now slouching towards some kind of birth. The primary focus of the directive is much tougher regulation of "alternative" investments, such as hedge funds, private equity funds, and the rest of Müntefering's locust class (funds, incidentally that have received no bailouts—but who cares about that in Brussels). That's not good news for the players in this market—mostly in the U.K.—and it could also represent a major obstacle to U.S. funds operating within the EU. In neither case is this a coincidence.

Hogtied by recent changes in the EU's rulemaking procedure, the U.K. cannot do much to stand in the way (should David Cameron's new, not very City-friendly government even feel so inclined). That leaves Washington as the last line of defense. There are clear and reassuring signs that Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner now recognizes the nature of the danger that American finance now faces.

That's something. But will the Obama administration really be prepared to go to the mat for an industry that it too finds convenient to demonize? And even if it is, just how much will Brussels be prepared to listen?

As Rahm Emanuel once said . . . ♦

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A Bad Deal Gets Worse

Obamacare is already damaging the individual insurance market. BY BETH HENARY WATSON

Hostility to the individual health insurance market and its less pleasant features, including medical underwriting, permeated President Obama's crusade for health care reform. Although Obamacare ultimately will outlaw underwriting based on health history, it will increase the number of people responsible for obtaining their own coverage. As costs continue to rise and new taxes go into effect leading up to 2014, the year the individual mandate kicks in, many individual health insurance consumers who previously were winners in the health care marketplace will find themselves on the losing side.

Take Obamacare's provision that premium price differentials based on age under the new state exchanges may not exceed a 3 to 1 ratio. Devon M. Herrick, a health economist at the Dallas-based National Center for Policy Analysis, calls this a "large cross-subsidy": The young and healthy will subsidize older people and those with more health problems.

"If you are an early retiree, you might love the idea," Herrick notes. "If you are a 22-year-old college graduate trying to freelance, you might not."

Herrick and other experts estimate the current differential in actual health care costs between those approaching Medicare eligibility and younger adults at closer to 5:1 or 6:1.

"At a time when younger individuals are being required to purchase health insurance, they are going to be seeing major increases in premiums because of this provision," says Robert Zirkelbach, a spokesman for the industry group America's Health Insurance Plans. "It will increase premiums percentagewise for younger workers much more than it will decrease premiums for older people."

Zirkelbach figures the 3 to 1 provision alone will cause premiums for consumers under 30 on the state exchanges to rise between 50 percent and 60 percent. Roy Ramthun, president of HSA Consulting Services and a visiting fellow at the Council for Affordable Health Insurance, suggests the figure could reach 70 percent.

It's important to pay attention to underlying premiums without the subsidies that will be provided for those earning less than 400 percent of the federal poverty level. First, although the law allows those younger than 30 to purchase relatively inexpensive catastrophic plans, everyone will age out of that provision. Also, some eligible for subsidies may earn their way out of them.

Using an online calculator from the Kaiser Family Foundation, I compared what two young Texas families might pay under Obamacare with what they pay today for their individual policies. Neither family expects to qualify for a subsidy in 2014, and Texas has fewer mandates than many other states and no "guaranteed issue" (that is, an insurance company can refuse to cover a given customer). So an individual market still functions.

The first family, a couple in their mid-30s with two children, owns a CPA firm, which has no employees. They now pay $245 per month for a no-frills Blue Cross Blue Shield plan with a $5,000 deductible. They also contribute monthly to a health savings account. According to the Kaiser calculator, in 2009 dollars this family could pay $720 per month on an Obamacare state exchange, a 194 percent increase.

Similarly, a couple in their late 20s who own a small remodeling business report paying $334 per month for a Blue Cross Blue Shield plan with a $1,500 deductible and no health savings account. Like most affordable individual plans, their policy does not provide maternity coverage, but they just wrote a check to the hospital for delivering baby number one and plan to do the same for baby number two, which is on the way. The Kaiser calculator estimates that this family could pay $617 per month in today's dollars to buy health insurance on a state exchange, an 85 percent increase. Of course, with the increased premium would come a more comprehensive list of mandated benefits, including maternity coverage.

Zirkelbach warns that the pain of astronomical premiums likely will be more intense in states that were less regulated before Obamacare than in states like Massachusetts, where the average family premium for an individually purchased policy was already $13,288 in 2009.

Most of the 6 percent of Americans with nongroup health insurance would probably agree with the Obama administration that such coverage has its unattractive aspects. On the individual market, potential customers face medical underwriting—a process unknown to those who have always enjoyed employer-sponsored insurance. Depending on the company, honest consumers must track down up to 10 years of their medical history. In states without guaranteed issue, every revelation of past need for health care carries the potential to trigger a higher rate or outright denial of coverage. Premiums and deductibles can be high, and benefits are less comprehensive than on the group market. Most premiums are not guaranteed even for a year and can escalate wildly as a result of global costs and other factors unrelated to one's personal health.

For example, in January I requested a change in my existing two-person policy at Assurant Health. After the

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underwriting process, the change, which included addition of a health savings account, was approved with a $334 monthly premium. But close to annual renewal time, in early April, I was notified that the premium would jump to $487, a 46 percent increase in one quarter. I appealed the rate hike, which coincided suspiciously with the passage of Obamacare, and two months later the increase was overturned on a technicality.

In the near term, new taxes and mandates that take effect prior to 2014, like allowing children to remain on their parents' policies until they're 26, as well as any cuts in Medicare reimbursements and any uncertainty insurers feel about the individual market itself, will stress this market further.

Eventually, 2014 will come, and with it the requirement that individuals who are not part of a group purchase health insurance or pay a fine. Although the fine will vary from $695 for an individual in 2016 up to 2.5 percent of a wealthier person's income, it will amount to less than what many individual consumers already pay. An industry survey pegged the national average family premium on the individual market at $6,328 in 2009. Inevitably, then, some people will prefer the fine.

With guaranteed issue going nationwide in 2014, James P. Gelfand, senior manager for health policy at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, notes that such people will wait till they're "in the ambulance" to buy insurance. "Because companies know people will do this, they will set funds aside" through higher premiums to pick up the slack.

Experts agree that it will most likely be younger, healthier workers who choose to pay the fine, leaving the state exchange pools sicker and thus more expensive, including for healthy people who follow the rules. Yet another consequence of Obamacare is that those who attempt to navigate the individual policy seas may have to do so with less expert help than they get now. With the law's requirement that insurance companies spend 80 percent of individual and small group premiums on care, companies may be forced to reduce the commissions they pay to agents and brokers, rendering these policies unappealing to those who normally guide individual buyers through the complexities of the health insurance market.

Surely, people will be able to get advice from the state exchanges, won't they? Maybe. But Roy Ramthun wonders: "Will it be like trying to ask the driver's license office what kind of car to buy?" ♦

Can the French Cut Welfare?

Sarkozy touches the troisième rail.

BY CHRISTOPHER CALDWELL

NEWSCOM

'I want to retire while I'm still alive': an anti-reform protest in Paris, May 27

Recently *Le Monde* interviewed Raymond Soubie, an adviser to President Nicolas Sarkozy. He told an astonishing story.

Soubie was working for then-prime minister Alain Juppé in 1995 when the nation underwent weeks of disruptive and violent strikes against reforms of the welfare state. As France veered towards major unrest, *Le Monde* wrote, M. Soubie and his colleagues asked the relevant ministers and business leaders which particular reform projects had lit the powder keg. To their great surprise, they discovered that no such projects existed. All it had taken was a phrase, a passing mention in a speech by M. Juppé about reforming the health service, to unleash one of the most spectacular clashes of the last 30 years.

This is why France's welfare state has always been as unreformable as it

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is unsustainable. It is not that reform is opposed—the hint of the shadow of a reform is met with civil disturbances. And yet, almost a month after the Sarkozy government issued proposals for modifying France's implausibly generous retirement benefits, the reforms are still given a good chance of passing.

The worldwide financial crisis has put France under dire fiscal pressure. The country is going broke in two ways, as Ernest Hemingway once put it: gradually and suddenly. The gradual aspect is that France's ratio of workers to retirees has been falling for decades. France had more than 4 workers per retiree in 1990, but now has around 3, and the figure will sink to about 1.5 by 2050. That will mean at least a $120 billion annual fiscal shortfall. The sudden aspect is that the ricketiness of the euro has forced countries in the eurozone to begin putting their fiscal houses in order. They have committed to bringing their debt back to 3 percent of GDP by 2013. France is not the least responsible budgeter in the West. Its 2009 deficit was 7.5 percent of GDP, well below the 12.3 percent in the United States. But that is small consolation. Getting back to 3 percent will require a savings of $115 billion over the next three years.

The problem with France's social security system is not that it pays employees too much. The average retiree gets paid about 54 percent of the salary he got during his working life, which is better than some European countries, worse than others. (French public employees do much better than private ones.) The problem, rather, is the absurdly early ages at which French people retire. When France first began to suffer permanent double-digit structural unemployment in the 1970s, its leaders had the idea that getting people to retire early would "make room" for younger workers. The unemployment problem would be solved not by increasing the numerator but by shrinking the denominator. In 1983, President François Mitterrand lowered the retirement age to 60.

The results were dramatic, but they did not include a fall in the unemployment rate. And while the official retirement age is 60, public-sector unions have won special consideration for "active" jobs. Firemen, prison guards, and policemen—but also railroad workers, customs officials, and sewage workers—can retire as early as 50. So retirement can, without exaggeration, take up most of a person's adult life. The average Frenchman collects retirement benefits for 24.5 years. The average Frenchwoman collects them for 28. Only 13 percent of French people aged 60-64 are in the workplace. Early retirement has various knock-on effects, too: Retraining workers for high-value-added jobs has been the obsession of Western governments of left and right for two decades. But what employer would be so foolish as to pay for a major retraining of a 47-year-old worker who is eligible to retire at 51?

The French view of welfare cuts resembles the House of Saud's position on apostasy. An Ipsos poll published in early June found just 14 percent of French respondents said they would accept a rise in the retirement age.

The trail France must follow has been blazed by her neighbors. Germany, where the retirement age is 65, recently voted to raise it to 67 by 2029. Britain will raise its own retirement age to 68 by 2046. The United States, with its retirement age stable at 65, is a laggard in reform. And yet, when Sarkozy's government hinted that a retirement age of 62 might be acceptable, trade unions hit the roof.

Ordinarily, that would be the end of the story. Sarkozy is calamitously unpopular. His party took only 26 percent of the vote in the most recent regional elections. What is more, there is a tradition in France of describing welfare programs as *acquis*—acquired things, done deals. Once enacted, a welfare benefit becomes a new constitutional right, an essential and nonnegotiable component of what it means to be a human being. The French view of welfare cuts resembles the House of Saud's position on apostasy. An Ipsos poll published in early June found just 14 percent of French respondents said they would accept a rise in the retirement age.

Such sentiments, however, do not cut as deep as they did even in 1995. In late May, the country's major trade unions called for a mass mobilization to protest the retirement changes. The Paris march drew only 22,000 people, according to police. The CFDT—descended from what used to be the Christian wing of the labor movement—had its annual meeting last week and voted against accepting a hike in the retirement age. But labor's ability to resist welfare reform is being eroded by the same demographic changes that make the system itself untenable.

The second big crisis addressed at the CFDT conference was the aging of its membership: Sixty-three percent of its leadership will be retired ten years from now. One senses that the unions do not believe they can stop the reform. They just want something to show for their capitulation, such as an assurance that the bulk of the new taxes raised to make the system whole will be raised from "the rich"—i.e., their employers—and not themselves. Such compromises are common. In them, one can see the seeds of France's structural unemployment problem.

It will be hard for Sarkozy to win even modest welfare reforms without trading away a centerpiece of his small-government agenda: the so-called *bouclier fiscal*, or "fiscal shield." The *bouclier* is George W. Bush's legacy to French politics, whether he knows it or not. Governor Bush told the 2000 Republican convention, "On principle, no one in America should have to pay more than a third of their income to the federal government." Whether he was following Bush or the zeitgeist, then-prime minister Dominique de Villepin made a similar promise to the French in 2006, with

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one small difference. He set the line of this-far-and-no-further, the line beyond which the state lost its moral authority to claim its citizens' pay, not at 33.3 percent but at 60 percent. In his 2007 campaign, Sarkozy campaigned on lowering the *bouclier* further, to 50 percent. Of course, in a country where government spending approaches 60 percent of GDP, to promise taxpayers that none of them will pay more than half their income in taxes is merely to promise (a) regressive taxation, and (b) deficits. Clearly the bedrock fiscal principle in France is that the state will never take more than 50 percent of your income unless it really needs it.

Still, Sarkozy has the stronger hand. Much as Ronald Reagan's mere mention of "welfare queens" led Democrats to rally behind the most indefensible parts of welfare, much as Bill Clinton's efforts at gun control led Republicans to oppose restrictions on ever more dangerous weapons, Sarkozy's opening of the retirement question has led Socialist leader Martine Aubry to reassert the doctrines of her party's purist left wing circa 1980. She has compared Sarkozy—through a logic only she can follow—to Bernard Madoff. She has alienated the members of her own party who passed second-grade math. Her most likely rival for her party's nomination in the 2012 presidential elections, IMF leader Dominique Strauss-Kahn, has said he doesn't want to follow any "dogma" on the retirement age.

What divides the parties is not the question of whether the retirement system is affordable now—the French increasingly understand that it is not. It is whether it is affordable under any economic circumstances, and whether it will become workable again once the financial crisis has passed. The Socialists argue that the crisis is the problem—it accounts for three-quarters of the deficit. Maybe so. But what is it a crisis of? It's a crisis of our assets' being worth less in fact than on paper. That is a terrible truth, but the French would be foolish to think they could return to pre-crisis arrangements by unlearning it. ♦

AP / SETHPERLMAN

Self-Destruction in Illinois

Democrats melt down in Obama's home state.

BY FRED BARNES

Chicago

Obamaland is crumbling. Democrats have firmly controlled Illinois, the president's home state, for nearly a decade, turning it into what one Republican called "a deep blue state." But this has changed almost overnight. In the midterm elections on November 2, Democrats stand to lose the governorship, Obama's old Senate seat, two to four House seats, and any number of state legislative seats and down-ticket statewide offices.

Democrats have been hit by a perfect storm, mostly of their own making. Illinois rivals California and New York as a fiscal and economic basket case. Democratic misrule has reached epic proportions, with the school districts, vendors, and doctors who treat Medicaid patients going unpaid for months. Unfunded state liabilities are mounting. And on top of all that, the trial of impeached former governor Rod Blagojevich, already dominating the news, is expected to continue for months.

"Who would have guessed two years ago that Illinois would be in play," says veteran Republican official Pat Durante. "Thank you, Democrats, for screwing things up."

Republicans had little to do with creating the political environment from which they are likely to benefit. Jerry Clarke, campaign manager for Republican gubernatorial candidate Bill Brady, told me prospects for Republicans haven't been this rosy in Illinois since 1946, when they picked up five House seats and made substantial gains in the state legislature. (Nationally, Republicans netted 55 House seats and 13 in the Senate in 1946, taking control of both chambers.)

Republicans have put together a strong slate of candidates. Brady, 49,

Bill Brady, GOP candidate for governor

was expected to finish a distant third or fourth in the gubernatorial primary on February 2. TV stations failed to send correspondents or crews to cover him on election night. They had to interview him on Skype, the computer phone service. Brady prevailed by 193 votes (out of 750,000). He appears to have unified Republicans behind his candidacy.

Brady won the primary thanks to a simple if risky strategy. He's a homebuilder from downstate Bloomington and has been a state legislator since 1992. He ran unsuccessfully for governor in 2006. This cycle, he concentrated on downstate voters, letting three well-known Republicans from

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the Chicago area split the vote there. Brady got 50 percent of the downstate vote, just enough to win when added to the small vote he received upstate.

Now he's devoting most of his time—80 percent, he says—to the Chicago suburbs and "collar counties" that were once a Republican stronghold. There's a rough formula for a Republican victory in Illinois: Offset a 500,000 vote loss in Chicago by winning by 250,000 votes in inner suburbs and by another 250,000 in the outer suburbs, then rely on the downstate vote. For Brady, the hard part will be breaking even upstate.

Brady's views are identical to Ronald Reagan's, which means he's a bit more conservative than the last three Republican governors and probably the state as well. He opposes legalized abortion except when the life of the mother is threatened—Reagan's position exactly. And just like Reagan, Democrats are attacking him as a right-wing extremist.

Brady and Republican strategists are convinced such attacks are irrelevant to voters this year. "I'm talking about the issues that resonate with people—jobs, spending, taxes," Brady says. He favors cuts in spending, a tax decrease of $1 billion, and a reduction in the size and authority of the state government in Springfield. "Government that has too much power leads to corruption," Brady says. Four of the past six Illinois governors were indicted. George Ryan, the Republican governor from 1999 to 2003, is in jail.

Since 2003, Illinois has been ruled by an oligarchy of Chicago Democrats, led by Rod Blagojevich (until his impeachment last year), House speaker Mike Madigan, and Senate president John Cullerton. Pat Quinn succeeded Blagojevich as governor. Madigan's daughter Lisa is attorney general. All of them, along with treasurer Alexi Giannoulias, auditor Tom Hynes, and secretary of state Jesse White, live within a few miles of each other in Chicago.

Their reign has been disastrous for Illinois. This year's deficit is $12.8 billion. The pension fund for state workers has an unfunded liability of $77.8 billion, and $20 billion in payments on bonds are also unfunded. The state's credit rating is plunging. One school district announced last week it'd deliver no more property tax revenues to Springfield until the state sends long-overdue education funds.

Illinois suffers from a net loss in migration: More people are leaving than arriving from out of state. The unemployment rate is 11.7 percent, two points higher than the national rate. Governors like Chris Christie of New Jersey and Mitch Daniels of Indiana make unflattering comments about Illinois.

Quinn is in a bind. For years, he was a liberal gadfly. But he joined the Democratic hierarchy in 2002 when he was elected lieutenant governor. Now he's dependent on the Democratic machine in Chicago. Blagojevich, twice his running mate, is a double drag on Quinn: He left behind both a fiscal wreck and a poisonous political atmosphere.

The Democrats' reign has been disastrous for Illinois. This year's deficit is $12.8 billion. The pension fund for state workers has an unfunded liability of $77.8 billion, and $20 billion in payments on bonds are also unfunded.

Quinn is desperate to raise taxes, which isn't the best campaign message. He's proposed, at one time or another, a 50 percent hike in the state income tax (from 3 to 4.5 percent) and another 1 percent surtax. He appears ready to accept any tax increase the Democrat-controlled legislature can pass. Not surprisingly, he trails Brady 47 percent to 36 percent in a Rasmussen poll.

Brady's campaign figured to play out in the shadow of Republican Senate candidate Mark Kirk, but the roles may be reversed. Kirk, a moderate House member from the ritzy suburbs north of Chicago, is regarded as one of the most impressive Republican candidates in the nation. He's a Naval reservist and expert on intelligence and national security who's served in Iraq and Afghanistan. And he's an unusually energetic campaigner.

But Kirk, 50, was caught with an embellished résumé, claiming an award that was actually given to his unit, not to him personally. Last week, the *Chicago Tribune* printed his explanation next to that of umpire Jim Joyce, whose bad call spoiled the perfect game of a Detroit Tigers pitcher. Joyce was unequivocal in admitting his error. Kirk looked less forthright in comparison.

A big advantage for Kirk is his Democratic opponent, Alexi Giannoulias, a pal of President Obama. The Giannoulias family bank, now defunct, lent to felons, thus earning him the label "mob banker." Giannoulias, 34, also hyped his résumé, claiming to run a charity. It turned out the charity doled out a pittance and no longer exists. Kirk leads 42 percent to 39 percent in a Rasmussen poll.

Republicans have at least an even chance of capturing two Democratic House seats, one held for years by former House speaker Denny Hastert, the other by one-term Democrat Debbie Halvorson. Against her, Republicans have one of their star recruits, 32-year-old Adam Kinzinger, an Air Force pilot who enlisted after 9/11.

The Republican resurgence is all the more surprising after the deep and seemingly permanent hole that they had dug for themselves. In Illinois last week, I asked Republicans to identify their low point. Most said it came in 2004 when, unable to find a candidate to run for the Senate against Obama, they imported Alan Keyes from Maryland to run. Keyes got 27 percent of the vote. Ryan's conviction on corruption charges in 2006 came second.

In 2010, Illinois Republicans are experiencing a political dream come true—or maybe a dream that's not quite true yet. At the moment, they have good candidates, strong poll numbers, and weakened opponents. Those are indicative of a strong Republican recovery. But, as Clarke puts it, "November 2 needs to get here." ♦

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End Them, Don't Mend Them

It's time to shutter America's bloated schools

By P.J. O'Rourke

The school year is drawing to a close. Time to balance the educational accounts and see what's been learned. Though not by my kids. I don't worry about them. They're geniuses like your kids and soak up knowledge the way a sponge (or a SpongeBob) does. Muffin, in sixth grade, has learned that Justin Bieber is very talented and doesn't—really, Dad—sing like a girl. Poppet, third grade, has learned how the Plains Indians made tepees. (They waited until after dinner to announce that their "Lifestyles of the Cheyenne" project was due tomorrow so that all the Cheyenne dads were up until one in the morning gluing dowels and brown wrapping paper to a piece of AstroTurf.) And Buster, kindergarten, has learned he can make himself giggle hysterically by adding "poop" to any phrase. The Little Engine That Could *Poop*.

No, the accounts that I'm balancing—and it's quite educational—are bank accounts. What's been learned is that it costs a fortune to send kids to school. Figures in the *Statistical Abstract of the United States* show that we are spending $11,749 per pupil per year in the U.S. public schools, grades pre-K through 12. That's an average. And you, like me, don't have average children. So we pay the $11,749 in school taxes for the children who are average and then we pay private school tuition for our own outstanding children or we move to a suburb we can't afford and pay even more property taxes for schools in the belief that this makes every child outstanding.

Parents of average students believe it too. According to an annual Gallup poll conducted from 2004 through 2007, Americans think insufficient funding is the top problem with the public schools in their communities. But if throwing money is what's needed, American school kids are getting smacked in the head with gobs of cash aplenty. That $11,749 is a lot more than the $7,848 private school pre-K through 12 national spending norm. It's also a lot more than the $7,171 median tuition at four-year public colleges. Plus $11,749 is much less than what's really being spent.

In March the Cato Institute issued a report on the cost of public schools. Policy analyst Adam Schaeffer made a detailed examination of the budgets of 18 school districts in the five largest U.S. metro areas and the District of Columbia. He found that school districts were understating their per-pupil spending by between 23 and 90 percent. The school districts cried poor by excluding various categories of spending from their budgets—debt service, employee benefits, transportation costs, capital costs, and, presumably, those cans of aerosol spray used to give all public schools that special public school smell.

Schaeffer calculated that Los Angeles, which claims $19,000 per-pupil spending, actually spends $25,000. The New York metropolitan area admits to a per-pupil average of $18,700, but the true cost is about $26,900. The District of Columbia's per-pupil outlay is claimed to be $17,542. The real number is an astonishing $28,170—155 percent more

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than the average tuition at the famously pricey private academies of the capital region.

School districts also cheat by simple slowness in publishing their budgets. The $11,749 is from 2007, the most recent figure available. It's certainly grown. The *Digest of Educational Statistics* (read by Monday, there will be a quiz) says inflation-adjusted per-pupil spending increased by 49 percent from 1984 to 2004 and by more than 100 percent from 1970 to 2005.

Bell bottoms and Jerry Rubin hair versus piercings and tattoos—are kids getting smarter? No. National Assessment of Educational Progress reading test scores remained essentially the same from 1970 to 2004. SAT scores in 1970 averaged 537 in reading and 512 in math, and 38 years later the scores were 502 and 515. (More kids are taking SATs, but the nitwit factor can be discounted—scores below 400 have decreased slightly.) American College Testing (ACT) composite scores have increased only slightly from 20.6 (out of 36) in 1990 to 21.1 in 2008. And the extraordinary expense of the D.C. public school system produced a 2007 class of eighth graders in which, according to the NAEP, 12 percent of the students were at or above proficiency in reading and 8 percent were at or above proficiency in math. Many of these young people are now entering the work force. Count your change in D.C.

There are 300,000 'clerical and secretarial staff' filling out No Child Left Behind paperwork and wondering why 64,000 'officials, administrators' aren't doing it themselves, which they aren't because they're busy doing the jobs that 125,000 'principals and assistant principals' can't.

The average IQ in America is—and this can be proven mathematically—average. Logic therefore dictates that National Assessment of Educational Progress eighth grade "at or above proficient" reading and math levels should average 50. This is true in only one of the 50 states. National averages are 29 and 31 percent. Either logic has nothing to do with public education or that NAEP test is a bear. Which I doubt. I have been told by the third grade teacher that my daughter Poppet is reading at middle school level. Yet if I leave Poppet a note in block letters telling her to feed the dogs I will come home to find the dogs have been . . . given a swim in the above-ground pool, dressed in tutus, provided with hair weaves. What I will not find is that the dogs have been fed. "I thought you wanted me to *free* the dogs," says Poppet whose school district is not spending quite what D.C.'s is, thanks to voter rejection of the last school bond referendum.

The District of Columbia is an extreme example of disconnect between financial input and educational outcome. Unfortunately extreme is not the same as abnormal. Comparing the *Statistical Abstract*'s 2007 ranking of states according to per-pupil public education spending with state-by-state NAEP 2007 eighth grade proficiency levels is an exercise that produces little information about the relationship between money and learning. In fact, if you stare at the figures long enough you will find information being sucked out of your brain.

Massachusetts (fifth in spending per student) and Vermont (first) do lead the reading proficiency list with 43 and 42 percent respectively. But there's not much to choose between that and 25th-biggest spender Montana's 39 percent. Montana, in turn, is tied with third-most-expensive New Jersey. And the four states with 37 percent proficiencies on the NAEP are sixth-in-spending hyper-literate Connecticut, 19th-in-spending rube Minnesota, eighth-in-spending canny Yankee Maine, and 43rd-in-spending hayseed South Dakota.

The NAEP math proficiencies are no more illuminating. Massachusetts leads with 51 percent. Second is Minnesota at 43 percent. Third place, with 41 percent, is shared by North Dakota (37th-in-spending) and champion spender Vermont. And both lavish New Jersey and 23rd-ranked middling Kansas have math proficiencies of 40 percent.

Looking at the bottom of the heap is just as confusing. Perhaps it's possible to spend too little on public education, and 47th-ranked Mississippi is trying to prove it. The District of Columbia aside, Mississippi's proficiency levels are the worst in the nation—17 percent in reading; 14 percent in math. However, the state that spends the least, Utah, slightly exceeds national averages. Meanwhile the second-worst state, New Mexico, is completely average in its school spending, ranked at 24. Tenth-in-spending Hawaii, with 20 percent in reading and 21 percent in math, is marginally inferior to 31st-in-spending California with 20 and 24 percent. And 49th-in-spending Arizona is a few points better than either. The only thing that can be said for sure is that the illiterate kids who have to take off their Crocs to add six and five have mostly been out in the sun too long.

There are other numbers that make better sense. As of 2006—of course the numbers are out of date—4,615,000 people were employed full-time by some 13,000 school districts (although if school districts used the same definition of "full-time" as the rest of us the number we're talking about would be zero). Of these 4,615,000 there are 300,000 "clerical and secretarial staff" filling out No Child Left Behind

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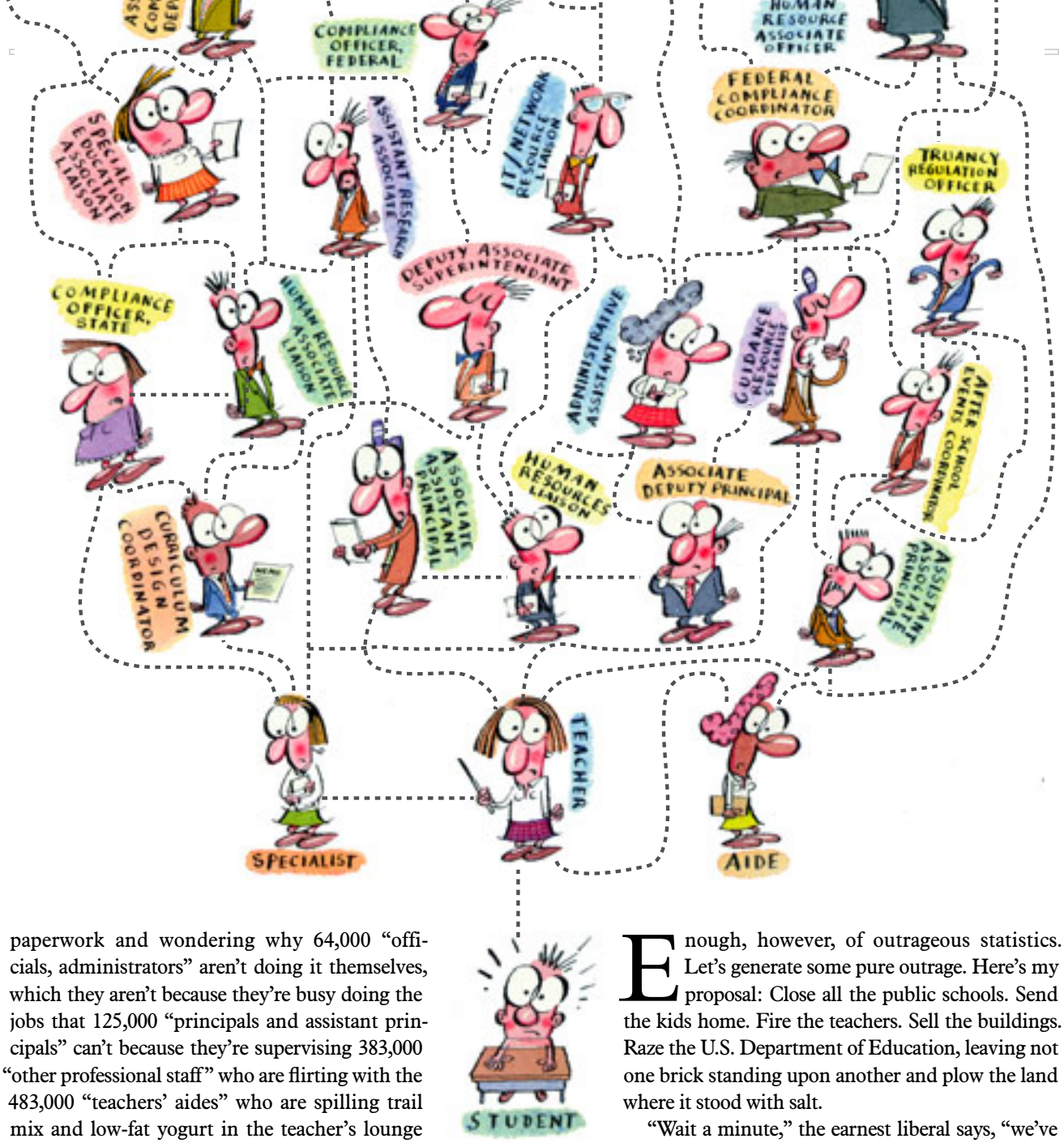

paperwork and wondering why 64,000 "officials, administrators" aren't doing it themselves, which they aren't because they're busy doing the jobs that 125,000 "principals and assistant principals" can't because they're supervising 383,000 "other professional staff" who are flirting with the 483,000 "teachers' aides" who are spilling trail mix and low-fat yogurt in the teacher's lounge making a mess for the 726,000 "service workers" to clean up, never mind that the students should be pushing the brooms and swinging the Johnny mops so at least they'd come home with a practical skill and clean the bathroom instead of sitting around comprehending 29 percent of their iPhone text messages and staying awake all night because they can only count 31 percent of sheep.

"Classroom teachers" number 2,534,000. That makes for a nationwide student/teacher ratio of 15.4:1, which compares reasonably with the 13.3:1 ratio in private schools and is an improvement over the 22.3:1 public school ratio in 1970, when kids still occasionally learned something. But the people-doing-who-knows-what/teacher ratio is getting close to 1:1.

Enough, however, of outrageous statistics. Let's generate some pure outrage. Here's my proposal: Close all the public schools. Send the kids home. Fire the teachers. Sell the buildings. Raze the U.S. Department of Education, leaving not one brick standing upon another and plow the land where it stood with salt.

"Wait a minute," the earnest liberal says, "we've got swell public schools here in Flourishing Heights. The kids take yoga. We just brought in a law school placement coordinator at the junior high. The gym has solar panels on the roof. Our Girls Ultimate Frisbee team is third in the state. The food in the cafeteria is locally grown. And the vending machines dispense carrots and kiwi juice."

Close them anyway. I've got 11,749 reasons. Or, given the Cato report, call it 15,000. Abandon the schools. Gather the kids together in groups of 15.4. Sit them down at your house, or the Moose Lodge, or the VFW Hall or—gasp—a church. Multiply 15.4 by $15,000. That's $231,000. Subtract a few grand for snacks and cleaning your carpet. What remains is a pay and benefit package of a quarter of a million dollars. Average 2008 public school classroom teacher salary:

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$51,391. For a quarter of a million dollars you could hire Aristotle. The kids wouldn't have band practice, but they'd have Aristotle. (Incidentally this worked for Philip of Macedon. His son did very well.)

"But what about the world class facilities to which every American public school student is entitled as soon as we get that bond issue through?" America spent more than $83 billion on elementary and high school construction in 2008. If you think kids care the slightest about their physical surroundings, take a look at my daughter Muffin's bedroom.

"Wouldn't having just one teacher—without even a qualified teacher's aide—narrow the scope of curriculum being offered to students especially at the secondary education level?" Maybe. But our public schools seem to have addressed this issue already. In the article on Education in the 1911 edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, I found this quaint description of the subjects studied at a typical American high school: "Latin, Greek, French, German, algebra, geometry, physics, chemistry, physical geography, physiology, rhetoric, English literature, civics and history." Or, as we call them nowadays, a smattering of Spanish, Fun With Numbers, Earth in the Balance, computer skills, Toni Morrison, safe sex, and multicultural studies.

"Don't kids need to experience the full range of human diversity that public schools provide?" No. And if you don't understand the process by which modern kids become socialized, you seriously need to update your Facebook page. Also, let the *Statistical Abstract* tell you something about the diverse experience provided by public schools. During the 2005-2006 school year 78 percent of public schools reported "violent incidents," more than one in six schools reported "serious violent incidents" (robbery, rape, sexual battery, or a fight or attack with a weapon), and 46 percent of schools reported thefts or larcenies. More than 10 percent of high school boys admitted to carrying a weapon to school during the previous 30 days. Among middle schools, 8.6 percent reported daily sexual harassment, 30.5 percent reported daily disrespect shown to teachers, and 43 percent reported daily bullying. Operating on the assumption that adults notice only about a third of what goes on among kids, this means that daily bullying occurs at 129 percent of middle schools. Furthermore 31.5 percent of middle schools and 38.7 percent of high schools reported "undesirable gang activities." As opposed to the desirable kind.

"Wouldn't closing the public schools eliminate valuable programs targeted for disabled students?" Yes. As of 2007, there were 6,007,800 children and young people with disabilities in the United States. But, also as of 2007, the Department of Education's budget was $66 billion. Those funds have been freed up. That's about $11,000 per disabled child plus the $15,000 each will receive as his or her pro rata share of the nation's education spending. A yearly benefit of $26,000 should provide some tutoring and therapy—or a pocket full of Ritalin.

"But some of America's disadvantaged regions may not have the financial resources to provide $15,000 per school age child." Yes they do. The 2007 per capita income in America's poorest state, Mississippi, was $28,845. The 2007 per capita GDP of South Korea was $27,400. Ever heard anyone say Korean kids are dumb as a bowl of kimchi?

"But some of America's disadvantaged persons may not have the cultural resources to utilize privatized educational disbursements. Some disadvantaged children may not receive any education at all." Fifteen grand per kid buys a lot of culture. And the possibility that someone's child may not receive any education is an improvement on a certainty that the child won't. Also, why are liberals so convinced that poor people are stupid? Is it because poor people vote for liberals? That is a fair point. But if smart liberals want to find out if poor people are stupid, I suggest that smart liberals go to the worst neighborhood they can find and get in a craps game.

"And this $15,000, is it just going to be available with no strings attached? Won't there be all sorts of exploitative scams cheating people who are seeking to educate their children?" Unfortunately there will be scams. What's to keep the District of Columbia Board of Education from going private?

America's public schools have served their purpose. Free and compulsory education was good for a somewhat unpromising young nation. The country was half turnip-head hillbilly and half slum trash from foreign refuse heaps. Public schools were supposed to take this mob of no-account pea pickers and bumbling greaseballs and turn them into a half-bright national citizenry. It worked, causing six or eight generations of public school kids to rush home to their shanties or tenements shouting, "Everything's up-to-date in Kansas City!" or "Mom, Dad, this is *America*, quit boiling cabbage!"

Public schools helped create the idea of America and inculcate Americans with a few rudiments of knowledge. To judge by that very American item, the Internet, a few rudiments is all anyone cares to have. As for the idea of America, everybody's got it now, all over the world. I've had a cab driver in New York who got the idea of America in a country so remote that not only had I never heard of it, neither had he. I don't know if this cab driver's reading level was at or above proficient, but his math skills were well-displayed on the taxi meter after he took me from JFK to Manhattan by way of the Brooklyn Belt Parkway. I'll bet he sends his kids to private school. ♦

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War and Remembrance

A father retraces the steps of his son, a gallant Marine who lost his life in the liberation of Iraq.

By Mary Katharine Ham

Baghdad

Of all the men I met in Baghdad, Colonel Ali Jafar most looks the part of a senior Iraqi officer. A large salt-and-pepper mustache lends him authority—as if he needed it at 6′6″. He rests a long arm comfortably against a stack of sandbags at least as tall as I am. Clad in desert camo, cigarette ever-present, he has the calm confidence of one accustomed to command.

We are standing in the expansive marble and sandstone portico of Saddam's Al-Faw Palace on Camp Victory with two American Marines, and the conversation has turned to old war stories.

Ali is suddenly animated, pulling his right pant leg halfway up his calf to reveal a gunshot wound he got in the first Gulf war. "U.S. Army," he says, pointing to a brown-gray scar on his shin the size of a quarter and grinning widely. Lieutenant Colonel Joel Poudrier, who served with Ali in Fallujah in 2006 and 2007, has seen this before.

"You know how he knows it was the Army?" Poudrier asks. "Because the Marines wouldn't have missed."

Another American, Colonel Tom Manion, USMC (Ret.), who is holding a lit cigarette he never smokes in his right hand, chuckles along with Ali. He too bears scars.

Three years ago, Manion's son, First Lieutenant Travis Manion, was killed in action by enemy sniper fire in Fallujah.

Mary Katharine Ham is a staff writer at The Weekly Standard.

First Lieutenant Travis Manion

COURTESY OF THE MANION FAMILY

No less than Colonel Ali, Travis was an archetypal military man. A broad-shouldered athlete with a quick smile, he was born at Camp Lejeune and graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy before serving two tours in Iraq, his first during the national elections of 2005. In Fallujah he was on supply duty but eagerly went out on raids, teaching his Iraqi counterparts as part of a Military Transition Team (MiTT). When the Iraqi soldiers with whom he served are asked about him, they use the word "warrior."

He was pulling wounded Marines out of the line of fire and fending off an enemy ambush when he was fatally wounded—displaying "conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity," as his Silver Star commendation has it.

I've known the Manion family for three years. I met them six months after Travis died, when 200 of his family members and friends came to Washington to run the Marine Corps Marathon in his honor. Travis had planned to run the race with his dad when he got back from Iraq. Instead, his father ran the race that day wearing two numbers. The official results say Travis Manion crossed the finish line at 4:19:39.

Back then, his mother Janet was barely able to speak at a pre-race dinner honoring Travis. This year, she virtually emceed the event. His older sister went from grieving her brother to leading a foundation in his honor. His father went from being a seemingly stoic, mostly silent, Gold Star father to a candidate for Congress in 2008, outperforming expectations in a tough Pennsylvania district and a bad year for Republicans, but ultimately losing to antiwar Iraq veteran Patrick Murphy.

Each member of the family has changed. Where they

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used to say "Since Travis . . . ," trailing off without finishing the sentence, they now say "Since we lost Travis," with affection and purpose. But beyond grieving, they've committed themselves to the mission Travis is no longer here to serve—the good of his fellow veterans, his country, and the people of Iraq.

So, three years after Travis's death, the father retraced his son's steps, walking into the cavernous belly of a C-130 on a sandy Kuwaiti night to fly to Baghdad. When he texted his wife and daughter from his cargo-net seat, a picture of Travis, smiling in the Iraqi sun under the full weight of his battle rattle, flashed on his BlackBerry screen, illuminating Tom's scuffed Navy Wrestling ballcap, acquired in Travis's academy days.

Travis was with him, as always, but this trip was less about the son than it was about the ideas for which he fought. It was not about overcoming the past, but gauging the future.

Travis died just at the moment when Anbar Province went from a killing field to an "awakening." There were more than 1,000 attacks in Anbar the month he arrived as part of an 11-man MiTT team attached to an Iraqi battalion in December 2006. By April, according to General David Petraeus's 2007 congressional testimony on the surge, that number had been cut in half, making the area safe enough for Defense Secretary Robert Gates to tour the week before Travis was killed.

When Travis was posthumously awarded the Bronze and Silver Stars, the deputy commanding general in Anbar, Lieutenant General John Allen, said, "He had a personal role in the liberation of Fallujah . . . and the shining example Fallujah has now become."

It was that personal aspect of the victory in Anbar that brought the nonsmoking colonel halfway around the world to share a smoke with Travis's fellow soldiers.

"One team, one enemy," is Colonel Ali's shorthand for the relationship between U.S. Marines and his Iraqi men. "When you lose your son, I lose my friend and I lose my officer."

A 30-year-old Iraqi second lieutenant, whose name was Hussam but whom we dubbed The Politician for a near-Barackian ability to respond to short questions with long answers, was Travis's counterpart, learning the job of a logistics officer under his tutelage. He said through an interpreter:

"We were all getting hit by mortars. If one didn't eat well, the other didn't eat well. If one didn't sleep well, the other didn't sleep well. The only time we were separated is when we went to bed."

He and Travis, who was an energetic debater himself, would wear out their interpreter with late-night talks over Iraqi food about The Politician's upcoming marriage, international relations, and the purpose of the U.S. mission in Iraq.

The Politician, like Travis, comes from a military family. He was in law school at the time of the American invasion, but saw no future for himself under what he called Saddam's "failed system." He assumed even if Saddam died, one of his sons would take over, so when Saddam fell the way he did, it "opened a door again" that he'd thought was shut.

Colonel Ali Jafar: 'One team, one enemy' is how he describes U.S.-Iraqi military ties.

WEEKLY STANDARD / MARY KATHARINE HAM

Another young lieutenant, who prefers his name not be used because his neighborhood in Baghdad is still dangerous, was with Travis on the day he was killed. A serious man who talks little, he was renowned among the Marines for his competence. Poudrier, an intel officer who served with him, said the Marines would have a briefing with the lieutenant about possible insurgents, and within just hours or days, the lieutenant would have rooted them out using his sources and delivered them to the Marines.

When the interpreter repeats Poudrier's tales of his exploits, the lieutenant lowers his head sheepishly and says, in Arabic, "It is only my duty."

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The lieutenant told the story of the fateful raid of April 29, 2007, slowly and in detail. He and Tom Manion bent over a map of Fallujah. The lieutenant pointed out a house he entered on a narrow alley. Tom raised his reading glasses and squinted at the intersection. The lieutenant said he knew a big family lived there, but he entered to see plates of food suddenly abandoned, the house silent and still—a sign that the locals knew there was about to be a fight.

Precious time was lost in translating the Arabic word for "ambush" into English. It was the second time we'd heard from Iraqi officers of a translation delay that put soldiers in danger.

"Travis participated with his blood for Iraq's freedom," the lieutenant told Tom, through an interpreter, standing and shaking Tom's hand for emphasis. "The American people and the Iraqis have made an investment of blood in freedom. You're seeing the fruits of this labor."

'Travis participated with his blood for Iraq's freedom,' the lieutenant told Tom, through an interpreter, standing and shaking Tom's hand for emphasis. 'The American people and the Iraqis have made an investment of blood in freedom.'

The battalion in which these officers serve is among the best in the Iraqi Army, a sort of special forces unit sent to hot spots around the country. There is no shortage of incompetent or corrupt officers in the Iraqi Army and police forces—this battalion has had its frustrations with both—but it was encouraging to hear a new generation of Iraqis talk about an open society, and the challenges inherent in becoming one, so hopefully.

As military men, they talk little about politics, though they worry openly that sectarian violence will increase if Iraqi politicians fail to work together. When asked about sectarianism, several said that in the Iraqi Army it is their duty to protect Sunni and Shia both, no matter what. They used the phrases "my duty," "my people," and "my country" liberally without reference to religious sect or tribe. They talked about equal treatment under the law and the meritocratic style of the American military. Some dreamed of traveling to America someday to train.

Almost uniformly, they lamented the U.S. decision to dismantle the military and other institutions after the initial invasion, saying it left a vacuum the violence filled.

As Poudrier points out, these officers have risked their lives every single day to quell that violence, often with little fanfare and without even the down time between deployments American soldiers get.

"Don't think it's just Americans making a sacrifice. What the Iraqi troops and the Iraqi people have sacrificed is tremendous," Poudrier said.

Colonel Ali offered a metaphor for the chaos with a matter-of-fact shrug: "If you put your foot on a fountain for a long time, and then lift it off very fast, what will happen?" He shook his head in dismay at an imaginary geyser shooting forth from under his foot.

Captain Omar, who was born the same year as Travis and went to an Iraqi military academy, is more expansive, speaking in slightly broken English:

> If you have a dog and you close him in a dark room for two years. He don't see anyone, don't see the light, just give him the [food] behind the door. Just give him food and close the door. After two years, open the door, and put him between the kids. What's he doing? He eat them. The freedom is like that. For 34 years the Iraqi missing the freedom. They were in the dark. . . . We need education, we need time.

He sees it as his duty to give his three children the safety and space to learn about freedom, so that the future will look different from Iraq at the turn of the 21st century.

"I hope you can go around and wander freely without any concerns someday," he told Tom through an interpreter.

His tone suggests Tom will come back to visit again someday, and they will meet for tea without military escorts or body armor. It is easy to look outside the palace, at the sandbags and concrete barriers and dusty armored vehicles, and doubt his vision.

But there is something familiar to Tom in the determination, sense of duty, and optimism of Captain Omar, The Politician, and the lieutenant. They are the Travis Manions of their country, the young leaders who will have to understand freedom and sacrifice at every turn to protect it from all enemies, foreign and domestic.

The Politician told Tom that Travis encouraged him not to give up on his country: "Stay in this army and you'll overcome this difficulty," The Politician said, paraphrasing Travis through an interpreter. "I view service in the army as an honorable task, serving people, which is an honorable thing," he went on. "[Travis] knew he was facing death, but he knew that if he died, this would be an honorable thing."

These young men, as unlikely as it seems, called an all-American, blue-eyed Phillies fan "brother," and Travis called them the same. That bond is part of the legacy of Travis Manion and all those who have fought and died in the counterinsurgency, making improvements in Iraq possible. Tom Manion plans to keep that legacy alive. ♦

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Friends in High Places

The Obama Justice Department went to bat for the New Black Panther party—and then covered it up.

By Jennifer Rubin

The case is straightforward. On Election Day 2008, two members of the New Black Panther party (NBPP) dressed in military garb were captured on videotape at a Philadelphia polling place spouting racial epithets and menacing voters. One, Minister King Samir Shabazz, wielded a nightstick. It was a textbook case of voter intimidation and clearly covered under the 1965 Voting Rights Act.

A Department of Justice trial team was assigned to investigate. They gathered affidavits from witnesses—one of the poll watchers was called a "white devil" and a "cracker." A Panther told him he would be "ruled by the black man." The trial team, all career Justice attorneys and headed by voting section chief Chris Coates, filed a case against the two Panthers caught on tape. Malik Zulu Shabazz, head of the national NBPP, and the party itself were also named based on evidence the party had planned the deployment of 300 members on Election Day and on statements after the incident in which the NBPP endorsed the intimidation at the Philadelphia polling station.

Panthers at the Philadelphia polling station on Election Day 2008

The trial team quickly obtained a default judgment—meaning it had won the case because the New Black Panther party failed to defend itself. Yet in May 2009, Obama Justice Department lawyers, appointed temporarily to fill top positions in the civil rights division, ordered the case against the NBPP dismissed. An administration that has pledged itself to stepping-up civil rights enforcement dropped the case and, for over a year, has prevented the trial team lawyers from telling their story.

The Panthers like to tout their "victory" and parrot the Obama Justice Department's line that the case was unmeritorious. The party held a national convention in Atlanta over Memorial Day weekend (sponsored and attended by the once mainstream Southern Christian Leadership Conference and a grab bag of socialist and anti-Semitic figures). Its website boasts: "The New Black Panther Party has been embroiled in a battle between Republican Congressmen and the U.S. Department of Justice over a 'voter intimidation' scandal for the last 18 months. During these 18 months right wing and Republican Newspaper and Electronic media have gone to exhaustive lengths to discredit and slander the New Black Panther Party and its Chairman and Attorney Malik Zulu Shabazz."

But on June 4, J. Christian Adams, a veteran lawyer in Justice's voting section and a key member of the trial team, resigned. His reasons were spelled out in a letter that also noted that the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, which was investigating the dismissal, had subpoenaed him and Coates, but their superiors, in violation of federal law, had ordered them not to testify. He noted that "the defendants in the New Black Panther lawsuit have become increasingly belligerent in their rhetoric toward the attorneys who brought the case. . . . Their grievances toward us generally echo the assertions [by Justice Department officials] that the facts and law did not sup-

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port the lawsuit against them." Coates, too, has left the Voting Section, moving to South Carolina to work in the U.S. attorney's office. Last Friday, the civil rights commission's general counsel, David Blackwood, announced that he had received an email from Christian Adams's attorney stating that Adams is now available to provide information to the commission. Commissioner Todd Graziano said they would schedule Adams's appearance at a public hearing as soon as possible as the commission had been seeking his testimony for many months.

With Adams's resignation and letter, a clearer picture is finally emerging of what led to the dismissal of the case, the actions of DoJ political appointees, the department's misrepresentations about the case, and the Obama administration's approach to civil rights enforcement.

Based on documents obtained by The Weekly Standard and interviews with Justice personnel, we now know far more about the sequence of events surrounding the dismissal. The then-acting assistant attorney general for civil rights, Grace Chung Becker, signed off on the case as the Bush administration was leaving office in January 2009. She confirms that the decision to file the case was an easy one. In response to my questions, she was emphatic that this was a serious case of voter intimidation. The trial team, which also included attorneys Robert Popper and Spencer Fisher, conducted its investigation and on January 8, 2009, filed suit against the NBPP. As the Panthers did not respond to the lawsuit, the department had a slam-dunk victory.

People familiar with the discussions between the Justice Department's career attorneys and the department's political appointees describe 'two days of shouting.'

The trial team was poised to enter a default judgment in late April 2009. An order for a default of judgment was drafted and sent to the voting section management. On the morning of April 29, the acting deputy assistant attorney general for civil rights, Steven Rosenbaum, sent an email to Coates about the case. It was the first indication by any department official that something was amiss. "I have serious doubts about the merits of the motion for entry of a default judgment and the request for injunctive relief," Rosenbaum, an Obama appointee, wrote. "Most significantly, this case raises serious First Amendment issues, but the papers make no mention of the First Amendment." Rosenbaum asked Coates a series of questions—whether "the defendants make any statements threatening physical harm to voters or persons aiding voters," for example, and what was the "factual predicate for enjoining the Party, as opposed to individual defendants"—which indicated that he was not familiar with the case and had not read the detailed memorandum accompanying the draft order.

The trial team was surprised by the email and answered Rosenbaum point by point in a response sent that same evening. They corrected his misstatements and explained in answer to his First Amendment concerns, "We are not seeking to enjoin the making of those (or any) statements. We plan to introduce them as evidence to show that what happened in Philadelphia on Election Day was planned and announced in advance by the central authority of the NBPP, and was a NBPP initiative." They pointed out that dressing in military garb did not raise First Amendment concerns when "used with the brandishing of a weapon to intimidate people going to the polling station." They concluded: "We strongly believe that this is one of the clearest violations of Section 11(b) [of the Voting Rights Act] the Department has come across. There is never a good reason to bring a billy club to a polling station. If the conduct of these men, which was video recorded and broadcast nationally, does not violate Section 11(b), the statute will have little meaning going forward."

The trial team assumed that Rosenbaum was simply confused about the applicable law. The notion that this was a problematic case would have been outlandish. With video evidence, multiple witnesses, and clear case law, it was one the easiest cases on which any of the trial team attorneys—who had more than 75 years of collective experience—had worked.

After sending the response, Coates and Robert Popper met with Rosenbaum and the then acting assistant attorney general for civil rights, Loretta King. People familiar with the discussions describe "two days of shouting." The trial team now knew that DoJ political appointees were serious about undermining the case by using whatever arguments they could dream up, including First Amendment concerns. The team prepared a detailed memo dated May 6 explaining the factual and legal basis for the case. In 13 pages, the attorneys meticulously analyzed the law and the facts and rebutted any notion that the First Amendment could insulate the Panthers. The memo made clear that Rosenbaum's and King's arguments for dismissing the case were spurious. Rosenbaum and King, for example, argued that legal precedent involving protestors at abortion clinics would undermine the case. The trial team pointed out, however, that these cases were either inapplicable or actually *supported* the issuance of an injunction when there was a significant government

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interest (such as the protection of voting rights) at stake.

The arguments continued after the May 6 memo was submitted. During one meeting in a conference room on the 5th floor of the Main Justice building, Coates became so exasperated he threw the memo at Rosenbaum who had admitted not reading the trial team's detailed briefing on the issues.

Rosenbaum and King sent a request to the appellate section asking their opinion of the case. The appellate attorneys sided with the trial team on May 13. Coates announced this to his team with the words "Good news." They all agreed it would be unthinkable for their superiors to nix the case. They were wrong. On May 15, Coates received an order to dismiss the case against everyone but the baton-menacing Shabazz. And they were ordered to scale back the injunction against him to cover only the display of a weapon within 100 feet of a Philadelphia polling place until 2012. (No other behavior was enjoined.)

The actions of King and Rosenbaum were unprecedented in the collective experience of the trial team. They were not alone in that assessment. A former associate attorney general for the civil division Greg Katsas testified before the civil rights commission on April 23, 2010, and termed the Panthers' actions a blatant case of voter intimidation. He said it was a "straightforward and overwhelmingly strong case" and that the Panthers' conduct was "egregious and intentional." As for the party itself and its leadership, Katsas said that under "general principles of agency law" they were liable.

From the onset, Justice has denied that any political appointees were involved in the decision to dismiss the case. This line was repeated in multiple letters to and face-to-face meetings with Republican representatives Frank Wolf and Lamar Smith and in statements to the media. We now know that this is incorrect. In interrogatory answers supplied to the civil rights commission, the department acknowledged that Attorney General Eric Holder was briefed on the decision to dismiss the case and that the number three man in Justice, Associate Attorney General Tom Perrelli, was consulted as well. Katsas testified, "Certainly DoJ's decision to abandon all claims against the party, Malik Shabazz, and Mr. Jackson [the second polling place intimidator], despite their refusal to even defend the case, would have qualified as important enough for the leadership of the Civil Rights Division to raise with [Perrelli]." The same is true of the decision to seek only a narrow injunction against the billy club-wielding defendant. He notes that the filing of the case may have been routine, but the decision to dismiss it was so extraordinary that someone of Perrelli's rank must certainly have played an "active role."

The New Black Panther party's website trumpets: "US Department of Justice dismisses 'Philly Voter Intimidation' Federal lawsuit."

The department is, moreover, trying to characterize King and Rosenbaum, who instructed the trial team to dismiss the case, as "career attorneys with over 60 years of experience." It is true that they both served in career positions at Justice in the past. But under the Federal Vacancies Reform Act, as soon as someone is appointed to fill a political position—as Rosenbaum and King were early in the Obama administration—they *are* political appointees.

Neither King nor Rosenbaum has directly worked on a voting rights case since the mid-1990s and both have received sanctions of hundreds of thousands of dollars by federal court judges for bringing unmeritorious cases and for failing to respond to court orders. In January 2010, a federal court judge in Kansas fined King and Rosenbaum for failing to respond to interrogatories in a housing discrimination case. Former civil rights division attorney Hans von Spakovsky has written: "That particular sanction is also very unusual—I have never seen a sanction order directed at individual lawyers that specifically says their employer is not responsible for paying the costs. . . . During the Bush administration, when liberals claim there was politicization going on in the division, I am not aware of a single such sanction." King and the Justice Department were also ordered to pay $587,000 in attorneys' fees and fines for bringing an unmeritorious claim during the Clinton administration in *Johnson* v. *Miller*. (In that case the court also took DoJ and King to task for allowing the ACLU to unduly affect the litigation decisions of the department.)

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The administration's internal investigation also appears to have been fraudulent. Under ongoing pressure from Representatives Smith and Wolf, an investigation by the Office of Professional Responsibility (OPR) was finally ordered to commence in July 2009. Until a few days before Adams's resignation, however, none of the trial team had been interviewed by OPR investigators.

Furthermore the department has been less than candid in congressional testimony. In December 2009, Assistant Attorney General Thomas Perez testified before the House Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights, and Civil Liberties, and he either did not understand the case fully or chose to disregard the documentation the trial team had put together. Perez said, for example, that Shabazz had received the "maximum penalty." An experienced voting rights lawyer scoffs at the statement. "The maximum penalty is Leavenworth." Perez then suggested that the attorneys on the trial team might have violated Federal Rule 11, which prohibits lawyers from bringing frivolous actions. The trial team was angered at the public insinuation that they had been derelict in their professional responsibilities.

In written responses to the civil rights commission, the Justice Department has claimed there was no evidence of involvement by outside groups—specifically the NAACP. Yet there is substantial reason to doubt this assertion. An attorney for the NAACP, Kristen Clarke, has admitted that she spoke to department attorneys about the case and shared the complaint with others. (In a deposition she also said that a department lawyer sent her news clippings of the case.) She spoke to a voting section attorney Laura Coates (no relation to Chris Coates) about the case at a Justice Department function. Clarke asked Coates, who she assumed was sympathetic, when the Panther case was going to be dismissed. The comment suggested that the NAACP had been pushing for such an outcome, and Coates reported the conversation to her superiors. Under oath in a deposition with the civil rights commission, however, Clarke denied six times that she had any conversations with Justice Department attorneys. When shown an email from a department attorney to her calling a *Washington Times* report on the NBPP case nothing but "lies" and declaring "This is CC's doing" she incredibly denied (despite her long association with him) that she understood the reference was to Chris Coates.

While the interference by political appointees in the NBPP case has been egregious, there is a critical issue with implications far beyond this single case: Whether the attorneys who populate the civil rights division of the Justice Department believe that civil rights laws exist only to protect minorities from discrimination and intimidation by whites. In a farewell address to his colleagues before his reassignment to a U.S. attorney's office, Coates spoke about this widespread sentiment and why it was antithetical to the department's mission to seek equal enforcement of federal laws.

Former voting rights attorneys confirm that the belief is omnipresent in the Justice Department. DoJ attorneys openly criticized the Panther case, objecting not to any lack of evidence or to the legal arguments but to the notion that any discrimination case should be filed against black defendants. There are instances of attorneys refusing to work on cases against minority defendants. In 2005, for example, Coates pursued, filed, and won a case (upheld on appeal to the Fifth Circuit in 2009) of egregious voter discrimination by black officials in Noxubee County, Mississippi. Colleagues criticized Coates for filing the case and refused to work on it.

Liberal civil rights lawyers argue that because "a history of official discrimination" can be one subsidiary factor in voting cases it "wipes out every other factor" and prohibits cases from being brought against blacks. And further, that since "socio-economic" factors can be considered in determining whether voting discrimination has occurred, these cases cannot be brought against black defendants until there is economic parity between blacks and whites. Such attorneys use phrases like "traditional civil rights cases" and "traditional civil rights victims" to signal that only minority victims and white perpetrators concern them. Justice sources tell me that career attorneys have been "assured" that cases against minority defendants won't be brought. In testimony before the civil rights commission, Thomas Perez denied he was aware of any such conversations or sentiments.

To date the Democratic Congress has exercised virtually no oversight over either the Panther case or the department's civil rights enforcement approach generally. The OPR investigation shows no sign of completion. Neither Holder nor Perrelli has been questioned in depth about his participation in the case or about the allegations that Justice attorneys don't intend to enforce civil rights laws against anyone other than white defendants.

Smith and Wolf, who just this week fired off two-dozen questions to Attorney General Eric Holder, continue to pursue the case, but without Democratic support they cannot subpoena either witnesses or documents. That may change after the November election. If the House of Representatives or Senate flips to Republican control and new committee chairmen decide to engage in actual oversight, Perrelli and Holder may find themselves forced by subpoenas to tell the complete NBPP story and explain why Obama's Justice Department believes the civil rights laws exist only to protect citizens of certain races. ♦

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Former governor Eliot Spitzer on Fifth Avenue, 2009

CHARLES OMMANNEY / GETTY IMAGES

Road to Ruin

Client Number Nine had other problems, too

BY FRED SIEGEL

It all seems so familiar: New York, once the Empire State, beset by a dysfunctional government and a dying upstate economy; a wildly popular, crusading attorney general seemingly on his way to a landslide gubernatorial victory by promising to revive the state's flagging fortunes. Four years ago, Eliot Spitzer was the man riding in on the AG's white horse; this year it's Andrew Cuomo.

Cuomo has no doubt carefully read Peter Elkind's *Rough Justice*, if only to see how his own role in the former governor's political demise is depicted. The "rough justice" in the title refers to the methods used by Spitzer as attorney general when he went after Wall Street executives, and also by Cuomo when, as Spitzer's successor, he went after Governor Spitzer's use of state troopers to subvert a rival. The method: Go after a guilty bigwig who has a lot to lose, try him in the press, squeeze him, and then force to him to quickly acknowledge his wrongdoing. The technique can be brutally effective. There's no need for subtleties or convictions, just a big PR victory. Cuomo used the same methods to discomfit Governor Spitzer that Attorney General Spitzer had used to make himself governor.

Rough Justice
The Rise and Fall of Eliot Spitzer
by Peter Elkind
Portfolio, 320 pp., $26.95

Elkind's book is primarily the story of Spitzer's descent into the world of "high class" call girls. But there are two, more substantial but less developed, stories folded into the book's melodramatic format. The first is the story of why New York's government works best for the people employed by government. The second involves the danger of electing candidates who are merely intelligent while lacking character, experience, and integrity.

There are a number of strands in Elkind's melodrama, none of which is plausible or well developed. In one, Spitzer is done in by his evil twin, Irwin. "Irwin" was the name staffers gave to Spitzer when he flew into one of his rages. But this theory of a split personality is so thin as to be a mere throw-in. The second, only hinted at, is that Spitzer was done in by sinis-

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ter Wall Street bad guys such as Hank Greenberg, the man he had deposed as head of AIG, and Ken Langone of Home Depot, who had been sued by Spitzer for his role on the New York Stock Exchange's compensation committee. Charges were eventually dropped against both men. But this is a barely developed argument by inferential suggestion. The third, and least plausible, theme is that Spitzer was done in by nefarious pols such as his arch-Albany enemy Joe Bruno, the dapper and corrupt Republican president of the state senate. This is the strand that should most interest Cuomo since it speaks directly to the problems he'll face should he be elected.

After 12 years of the increasingly lethargic and ethically challenged administration of Republican governor George Pataki, who entered the statehouse in 1995 a man of modest means and left a millionaire in 2006, New York, burdened by a famously dysfunctional legislature, was ready for a new departure. Disgust with Albany, which had been hit by a series of legislative scandals, had reached new levels. The number of lobbyists had doubled during the Pataki years, property taxes were 70 percent above the national average, and the business climate was rated the worst, or next to worst, in the nation. Upstate New York, and particularly western New York, was dying. Spitzer shocked downstate when, campaigning for governor in 2006, he described part of New York as "Appalachian" in its poverty, but he wasn't far off the mark. Spitzer, who was already being mentioned as a future president, ran on two Obama-like slogans: "total change" and "on day one everything changes."

In his January 2007 inaugural speech, Spitzer decried, "The burdensome property taxes and the health care we can't afford . . . the jobs that have disappeared from our upstate cities and the schools that keep failing our children. . . . Like Rip Van Winkle," he went on, "New York has slept through much of the past decade." Spitzer proposed a billion-dollar development fund for upstate New York, more support for the State University of New York, which he saw as a potential economic engine, lower property taxes, and more school aid. But to pay for all that he had to slow the growth of health care spending, which was crowding out every other item in the budget. New York was spending more on Medicaid than Florida and Texas combined, and getting only mediocre care in return.

"Medicaid spending," argued Spitzer's friend and ally Lloyd Constantine, "foreclosed the possibility of progress in education, infrastructure construction and repair, and numerous social and environmental programs." So Spitzer proposed, as a bargaining position, cutting the rate of Medicaid spending growth from its customary 8 percent a year (roughly four times the rate of inflation) to only one percent. That put him on a collision course with both Dennis Rivera, the head of the SEIU's health care affiliate Local 1199, who became one of the key architects of Obamacare, and Rivera's close political ally Senate President Joe Bruno. And thereby hangs a tale.

In his rush to the White House, Spitzer never concealed his well-justified disdain for Albany's hacks. In a famous exchange very early in his tenure, he told a legislator to get out of his way, saying, "I'm a f—ing steamroller."

The trim, silver-haired Bruno, then 77, was a fixture in the Albany region which benefited richly from his patronage. The eponymous local baseball stadium is known as "the Joe," and the local airport and Amtrak station are adorned with his busts. When upstate had lost so many jobs and Republicans that the GOP hold over the senate was threatened, the moderate conservative Bruno entered into a political partnership with Local 1199's Rivera, whose hard left leanings have never prevented him from striking an advantageous deal for his hospital workers.

"1199," Spitzer snarled, "owns Joe." Spitzer rightly saw that their arrangement was bleeding the state fiscally. Bruno was already under federal investigation, and had Spitzer been patient, he could have just waited out the GOP leader. But after 1199 ran a richly funded ad campaign claiming that he was slashing health care spending, Spitzer, who didn't have the nerve to confront the union directly, stepped up his campaign against Bruno. Spitzer's staff provided the *Albany Times-Union* with records indicating that Bruno was illegitimately using the state's helicopter for political fundraising expeditions. This was nothing new—Governors Cuomo and Pataki had acted similarly—but when Fred Dicker of the *New York Post*, the state's most influential columnist, broke the story of "troopergate," describing how Spitzer's staff was misusing the state police to track Bruno's activities, Spitzer, mocked by Bruno as a "spoiled brat," never recovered politically. Even before he became famous as Client Number Nine, the guy who liked to have sex with his socks on, Spitzer was finished as a force in Albany.

In his rush to the White House, Spitzer never concealed his well-justified disdain for Albany's hacks. In a famous exchange very early in his tenure, he told a legislator to get out of his way, saying, "I'm a f—ing steamroller." The son of a wealthy man, Princeton and Harvard-educated, Spitzer was convinced that since, in the words of his communications director, "he was 'smarter than all these sons of bitches,'" he didn't need to come to terms with them. When one of his aides explained that the governor needed to share his success with the legislature, Spitzer, the perpetual sophomore, responded, "Why should I want to do that? Divvying up credit is a tawdry game. They should want to do it because it's the right thing."

Spitzer had been able to intimi-

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date CEOs with a few well-placed headlines that drove down their share prices. But parochial pols were a different matter; they didn't have reputations to protect. And besides, as New York's political system had collapsed along with the upstate economy, half of the legislators won with 80 percent of the vote or more. A defeated incumbent who hadn't already been indicted was a rarity.

"How," asked Lloyd Constantine, who counted himself among the best and the brightest, "could such an A+ student of government fail to recognize that success as governor required skill in, and respect for, consensus building, conciliation, and compromise?" Good question. The best answer comes from Raskolnikov in *Crime and Punishment*, who explained that "an 'extraordinary' man has the right . . . that is not an official right, but an inner right to decide in his own conscience to overstep . . . certain obstacles, and only in case it is essential for the practical fulfillment of his idea," which might benefit all of humanity.

Andrew Cuomo will have no such problem. He was neither an A+ student nor devoid, like Spitzer, of practical political experience. Schooled in the trenches of Albany's political battlefields as a young man when he served as his father's enforcer, Andrew Cuomo starts off with a far better knowledge of the legislature's folkways than Spitzer. But he's also far more closely tied to 1199 than Spitzer ever was. Local 1199's political organ, the Working Families party, made him attorney general.

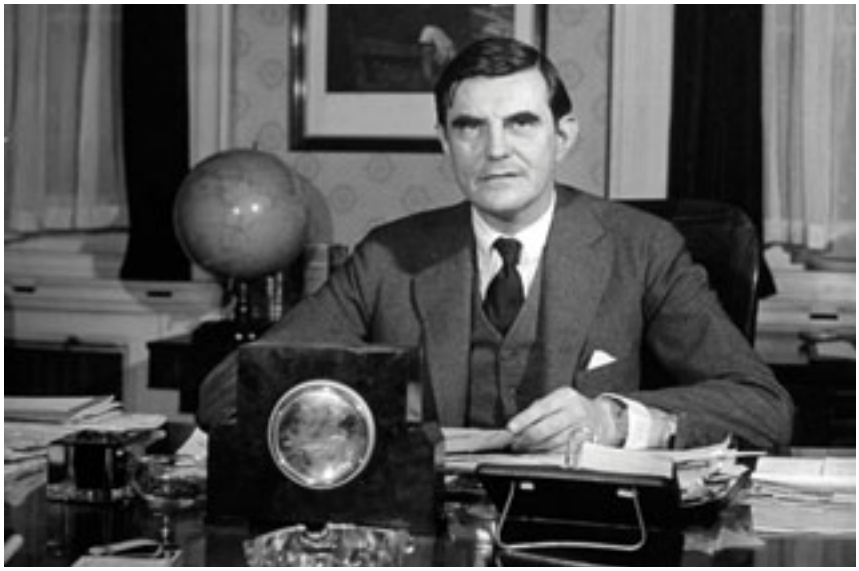
Recently, Cuomo released a 224-page report on New York's problems, the best part of which calls for a 2 percent cap on property tax increases and reads as if it had been drafted by the Empire Center's E.J. McMahon, the leading critic of Albany's fiscal follies. But when it comes to health care spending, the document becomes flaccid. Maybe that's wise; maybe he's looking to avoid a fight with his old allies even before he enters office. But sooner or later, if Cuomo is to govern effectively, he will have to take on the public sector spending monster that destroyed Eliot Spitzer as surely as did his overactive libido. ♦

B&A

London Calling

The American contribution to the British war effort.

BY JORDAN MICHAEL SMITH



Ambassador John Gilbert Winant, 1945

HANS WILD / TIME & LIFE PICTURES / GETTY IMAGES

At the outset of World War I, Woodrow Wilson told Americans that "we must be impartial in thought, as well as action, must put a curb upon our sentiments." Twenty-five years later, at the start of another world war, a different American president advised something else: "This nation will remain a neutral nation, but I cannot ask that every American remain neutral in thought as well." Franklin D. Roosevelt's intimation that Americans should privately be in solidarity with Britain against Hitler's Germany was adopted literally by some Americans, a few of whom lived in London during the darkest days of World War II. The most prominent among them are the subjects of this book.

Citizens of London
The Americans Who Stood with Britain in Its Darkest, Finest Hour
by Lynne Olson
Random House, 496 pp., $28

Lynne Olson knows the subject well. A former journalist, she coauthored a volume on a Polish squadron in the Royal Air Force during the war; coauthored a book on Edward R. Murrow and his brothers, one of the subjects of this study; and, most recently, wrote *Troublesome Young Men* about the Tory rebels who supported Winston Churchill into power in 1940.

Like that work, *Citizens of London* is part biography, part history, part encomium. Beginning with the Battle of Britain, it follows three Americans who lived in London promoting the Atlantic alliance: Averell Harriman, administrator of Lend-Lease aid; Edward R. Murrow, head of CBS News in Europe; and John Gilbert Winant, the American ambassador who succeeded Joseph Kennedy.

It is Olson's belief that the Anglo-American Alliance, the "Special Relationship," was established and solidi-

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fied in no small part because of this Yankee trio, whose roles have been largely unexamined. "As the most important Americans in London during the war's early years," she writes, they "were key participants in America's debate over whether Britain, the last European country holding out against Hitler, should be saved." Winant, Harriman, and Murrow "la[id] the groundwork for the two leaders' partnership, at a time when Roosevelt and Churchill not only were strangers but were suspicious and even hostile toward each other."

Citizens of London is also something of a tribute to London itself. As Olson tells it, the British capital was *the* place to be during the war, the center of excitement, danger, and culture for all Westerners, as Paris was to the Lost Generation. Utilizing the memoirs and archives of the participants, Olson re-creates wartime London as a city of a hundred love affairs, a thousand dramatic moments, and an infinite number of sacrifices. The Atlantic Alliance and England's lonely stand against Hitler are exhaustively analyzed topics, but Olson has found some fresh angles and little-known facts. Ambassador Winant, in particular, emerges as a hero: Largely lost to history—the only biography of him was written in 1968—he was eulogized at his death by the *Daily Express* as having "walked with Britain at her greatest," and Olson performs a public service in reviving his reputation. Also well recalled are Murrow and Harriman's contributions, both in encouraging the British and in swaying American opinion away from isolationism. Harriman is painted here as a devious but well-intentioned operator who managed to put himself in the right place at the right time; Murrow's moral and physical courage in besieged London are shown in detail.

Still, for all their importance, Olson never fully establishes that the trio's advice was greatly influential with Roosevelt, who was always cagey both about his views and his sources of information. Eleanor Roosevelt is quoted to the effect that her husband "trusted" Winant and that "he helped us win the war"—but she wouldn't necessarily know what FDR was really thinking. On Anglo-American affairs, the White House adviser Harry Hopkins might well have been more influential with Roosevelt than Ambassador Winant. And of the three, Murrow, with his groundbreaking broadcasts from the middle of the Blitz, was probably the most important in persuading Americans of the folly of isolation.

The degree to which our trio became true citizens of London is remarkable—but also a bit disconcerting. Olson writes that Harriman and Winant "were, in effect, serving two governments: they were their country's top representatives in Britain while acting as Churchill's agents for conveying Britain's needs to the United States." She notes, of course, that their primary duty should always have been to their own president and country.

But political loyalties aside, *Citizens of London* is plain fun to read. Dishing about the Americans' love affairs with some of the Churchill girls is particularly delicious, as Winston's daughter-in-law Pamela slept with Murrow and Harriman (whom she married a quarter-century later) and his actress-daughter Sarah took up with Winant. The beleaguered prime minister's diplomacy in overseeing these emotional complications makes for fascinating reading, and it is a testament to Olson's talents that such gossipy details don't cheapen the heroic acts described elsewhere, but humanize our heroes and deepen our admiration. ♦

B&A

Talk of God

Barring religious convictions from the public square enervates the debate. **BY DAVID WOLPE**

Pose a fundamental question on human values in America and you will hear three voices in response, sometimes simultaneously.

First is the slightly hectoring tone of scientific materialism: We are all products of natural forces. The same evolutionary pressures that fashioned the mountain and the amoeba made your mother. All synapse; no soul. This is the voice in the peremptory statement of evolutionary biologist David Barash that "there can be no such thing as *free will* for the committed *scientist*." Partisans stand proudly in the disillusionary circle: You might think you have a mind (as opposed to a brain), but we know better.

The Disenchantment of Secular Discourse
by Steven D. Smith
Harvard, 304 pp., $26.95

The second approach, often spurred by a commitment to the first, argues for a common moral patrimony. Animals we may be, but we can still agree on values. This is less a voice than a cacophony. Public philosophers and theorists have set themselves the thankless task of seeking a foundation for values. One will argue for solidarity, another for the rock-solid necessity of human dignity. But why should solidarity or dignity outweigh other values? What, in the ugly but pervasive lingo of the modern academy, persuades us to "privilege" one or the other, or a third choice?

Martha Nussbaum argues that we should judge a society by capabilities—how much human flourishing of capability it allows. But those who

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favor rigid gender roles, for example, might perceive differences in capabilities of men and women. Or they might insist that social cohesion trumps capability. There is also the inconvenient fact that we are capable of some pretty reprehensible things. So while insisting upon "rights," these voices find it impossible to agree on what rights are or which ones obtain, and for different schools the constitution is less a guide than a pretext. Can anyone raise a societal structure of values through the assumptions of evolution or the wayward operations of human reason?

The third voice is that of religious discourse. Here the foundation is solid, but also rigid. Human beings matter more because they are made in the image of God, and that's that. You get a less messy argument, but you have also sealed off discussion.

Therefore, writes Steven Smith, professor of law at the University of San Diego, this third level has been ruled out of court, both the civil court and the court of public discussion. Again and again we hear that religion cannot participate in questions of politics because you cannot argue with another's religious conviction. Philosophy and science are permitted, but not faith. Smith reminds us that religious people never say "don't talk secular," yet secular people do say "don't talk religious."

Who is the muzzler and who the muzzlee, exactly?

Smith insists that barring religious convictions from the public square enervates the debate. Even the greatest partisans of reason recognize (in David Hume's words) that "reason is incompetent to answer any fundamental questions" about God, or morality, or the meaning of life. Moreover, religious life is rife with disputation. Saying one is religious does not close off the argument—indeed it often invites it, even within the same faith.

As a result, reasonableness replaces reason; people cannot bring their most deeply held convictions to the deepest societal questions. In place of a robust exchange, we get a pallid politesse—or, as often, unmoored insults. A strictly secular vocabulary is "insufficient to convey our full set of normative convictions and commitments."

We cannot really manage without religious presuppositions but we are not allowed to invoke them. So public discourse is full of "smuggling." When

David Hume on Edinburgh's Royal Mile, Carl Becker at Cornell

a legal theorist like Ronald Dworkin writes about "human nature"—whether we are basically good or essentially depraved—he is appealing to religious principles under the guise of secular argument. Look closely and you can see the mitre under the mortarboard.

Smith writes about legal theory, but also history, philosophy, and medical ethics. He reminds us of the pungency and relevance of Carl Becker's little classic, *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers*. Becker demonstrated that the apostles of enlightenment could not untangle their philosophical feet from religious netting. As Smith puts it: "While purporting to derive ethical guidance *from* human experience, in fact they systematically imported their own preconceived values and imposed these values *onto* human experience." Even Voltaire nods, and Becker caught him at it.

Value differences cluster around

> two dominant normative families—not the Corleone and Tattaglia families, but rather the autonomy-liberty-freedom family and the equality-neutrality-reciprocity family. These powerful and eminently respectable normative families do a good deal of legitimate business, for which we may all be grateful—I certainly am—but they also run extensive smuggling operations.

Each is buttressed by religious values and assumptions—Man is in the image of God; I am my brother's keeper, etc.—but is unable to acknowledge, invoke, or debate them. In successive chapters Smith shows how religious assumptions undergird debates on euthanasia, free speech, utilitarianism, human rights, our attitude toward scientific experimentation, and other public questions.

This is an engaging, clear, provocative, even witty book. In fact, the least winning part of it is the title: Such a cumbersome title seems designed to have the reader open the book with a sigh—there is fiber in this intellectual diet. It is a mild disservice to a sparkling work on the history of ideas and the hidden realities of public discourse. Smith makes a persuasive case that, if we were freer to express our allegiances, we would still disagree; but our disagreements would reflect the commitments on which they were truly based. Public discussion would be richer and deeper. ♦

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B&A

Beautiful and Damned

Power, glamour, and the vagaries of transatlantic alliances. **BY NOEMIE EMERY**

In 1996, at age 47, Bill Patten, son of Susan Mary Alsop, the author and doyenne of the great age of Georgetown, found out to his shock that he was the son not of his mother's first husband, Bill Patten Sr., but of Duff Cooper, the British politician and diplomat (and with his wife, Lady Diana, one-half of one of the 20th-century's most glamorous couples) with whom his mother had had an affair. Understandably poleaxed by this revelation, he embarked on a struggle to regain his bearings, which led him in turn to this book: a personal story, a social history, and a four-part assessment of his mother and the three leading men she encountered: his real father Duff Cooper; his putative father Bill Patten; and her second husband, Joseph Alsop, the well-known (and gay) American journalist, who entered into a chaste marriage with his boyhood friend's widow, and served as the younger Bill's stepfather and mentor until he, Alsop, died.

My Three Fathers
And the Elegant Deceptions of My Mother, Susan Mary Alsop
by Bill Patten
PublicAffairs, 400 pp., $27.95

A personal journey, it is also a story of intrigue, deceit, and ambition, set in a background of upper-case History, in which Bill Patten's real father is the only one he doesn't perceive as a father; friends cuckold friends, and go on being friendly; and his mother's second husband is not really her husband, as most people think of the word. The book refers at times to Susan Mary as a "Henry James heroine," but this understates it: *My Three Fathers* in itself is three James novels, conflated and crushed into one. At times it is like *The Europeans*, in which American innocents (Susan Mary and the elder Bill Patten) are charmed and corrupted by scheming aristocrats (Duff and Diana). At other times it is like *The Wings of the Dove*, in which the elder Bill Patten plays the Milly Theale role of the American innocent doomed to die young who still wins the hearts of those who betray him. And sometimes it is like *The Golden Bowl*, in which a couple (Joseph Alsop and Susan Mary) wed in the interests of social advancement, and become the premiere host and hostess of John F. Kennedy's Washington. Detailing it all is the narrator and critic, a detached and somewhat unhappy observer who longs to be in a less complex book altogether and, by its ending, has found his way out.

Susan Mary Jay was born in Rome in 1918 into a family of diplomats that went back to John Jay, the Founder, and had lived in San Salvador, Romania, and Argentina before she was eight. The family had been in Buenos Aires a matter of months before her sister Emily died, an experience from which she and her parents would never recover, and which may have bred in her the reserve, distance, and stoic detachment of which her only son later complained. Brought up in Maine, where her parents retired, she grew up a slender (if not anorexic) young woman, a serious soul and delicate beauty, with small chiseled features and dark chestnut hair. In spite of her looks and interest in style (she worked for *Vogue* for a few years before she was married), the impression she left on perceptive observers was one of resilience, endurance, and grim resolution.

She was a "tough, appreciative little guest," Evelyn Waugh wrote to Nancy Mitford after she stayed with his family. "I thought of her as a brave little soldier," the author confesses. "The woman I knew was a gritty survivor," Edwin Yoder would write. The survivor and soldier would have her hands full when, in 1939, she married Bill Patten, whose lung problems were a perpetual problem and who also fell somewhat short of the drive and talent to make a name for himself in the larger political world that she craved. Susan Mary saw his limitations, and accepted them, without wholly forgoing her central ambitions. "Bill never had the standing in the world of power that my mother aspired to, but nonetheless she adored him," the younger Bill tells us, adding that she later told him that, if she only craved power, "I wouldn't have married your father, whose career was all too clear before we were married, and who was the best and bravest man I know."

The elder Bill Patten, who had struggled at Groton, held low-pressure, midlevel jobs both before and after his marriage, and might have stayed in them happily if not for a chance meeting in 1944 with Sumner Welles—an old friend of Peter Jay, Susan Mary's father—who pulled strings to get him posted to Paris as an economic analyst attached to the Foreign Service Auxiliary. And so in April 1945 Bill and Susan Mary landed in Paris, then the teeming hub of postliberation diplomacy, where Duff and Diana held court.

Duff and Diana—the It Couple of the mid-20th century who would have had the scriptwriters at Masterpiece Theatre working nights and on weekends—were then ensconced at the British embassy in the war-ravaged city, and at the height of their glamour and fame. Duff's great-great-grandfather was King William IV, whose two children by his wife the queen died in infancy, but whose 10 children by his mistress, the Irish actress called "Mrs. Jordan," did not. The sixth of these, Duff's great-grandmother, married the eighteenth Earl of Errol, and it was her granddaughter who became Duff's mother, after his father, a society

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physician named Alfred Cooper, rescued her from the social disgrace she had courted when she ran off in succession with two different men. Duff took his brains from his father, but his libido came from his mother's side of the family, as he evolved into a womanizer on the John F. Kennedy level, known for the scope and variety of the affairs he conducted, even while married (like Kennedy) to a stunning and erudite wife.

Born in 1890, Duff went to Eton and Oxford, joined the Foreign Office in 1916 and the Grenadier Guards the year after, survived trench warfare and came home a hero, and resumed his career, becoming an intimate of Winston Churchill and a hero to the Churchill wing of the Tory party when he resigned his cabinet post in protest over the Munich agreement in 1938. In 1919 he had married Diana Manners, daughter of the Duchess of Rutland—though not of the Duke; her natural father was Henry Cust, a philandering man about Parliament—a free-spirited soul and ravishing beauty who supported him financially in his early political efforts by touring in a play, *The Miracle*, in Britain and the United States. Duff adored Diana, and was unfaithful to her from the very beginning—a state of affairs from which she first suffered, but came to tolerate, and then to abet, befriending many of her husband's diversions and consoling them when the relationships came to their end.

"Duff and Diana enjoyed an unusual but functional relationship at the center of an extraordinary world of celebrities, writers, and intellectuals," writes the younger Bill Patten. When her son once asked her how she endured Duff's betrayals, she answered quite simply, "They all were the flowers. . . .I was the tree." In time, Susan Mary became one of the flowers and a friend of Diana's—so close that when Nancy Mitford wrote *Don't Tell Alfred*, a satire loosely based on Diana, she wrote in Susan Mary as her abjectly devoted American friend.

As far as he knows, Bill Patten was conceived during a weekend at Ditchley, the country house owned by Sir Ronald Tree (second husband of Susan Mary's girlhood friend, Marietta) in October 1947 while the elder Bill Patten was in a nursing home in London, two years after Diana had seated Susan Mary next to Duff at an embassy dinner, "an unusual honor for a twenty-seven year-old diplomat's wife." The consensus is that Susan Mary had been smitten by Duff—a hero, a writer, an intellect, and her beau ideal of a statesman—while he had been less so, calling her "sweet," "charming," and "most attractive," but also maintaining that "it would be dishonest to pretend that I am madly in love."

Throughout, Susan Mary and Duff went on adoring Diana, and all three remained devoted to the elder Bill Patten, she writing of Bill's "unfailing kindness" and Duff of his reluctance to "cloud the happiness of what has seemed to me to be the perfect ménage." To the younger Bill Patten, who said he would always think of the elder Bill as his father, the most unsettling part was the ongoing friendship, and the acquiescence of the elder Bill in it all.

Better to tend one's own garden, he seems to be saying, than to aspire to power and changing the world. But of course, the world and the garden are not unconnected.

> I feel disappointed that Bill tolerated my mother's affairs so nobly. . . . Although my mother had told Duff . . . that her husband was a Puritan who would never forgive her . . . it appears that Bill not only forgave [her] but also got along famously with Duff.

At times, he blamed them for exploiting Bill's weakness; at times, he blamed Bill for accepting it; at times, he respected Bill for his civilized attitude; at times, he wanted him to knock Duff Cooper out. "I feel a messy swell of emotions when I think about Bill's response," he confesses. "Sometimes I feel contempt, sometimes admiration. There is no clear or easy answer in my mind as to how Bill 'should' have reacted to my mother's affair with Duff."

In 1947, the Coopers were recalled to London when Susan Mary was newly pregnant with Bill. "It is hard to know whose departure my mother mourned most, Duff's or Diana's," the author informs us. "She, along with some of Duff's other mistresses, helped plan a secret farewell party for Diana before the Coopers left the Embassy in 1947, though there is no record of whether she joined her fellow mistresses in performing a unicorn ballet." When Duff died suddenly on New Year's Day 1954, en route to Jamaica on a cruise with Diana, Susan Mary left at once to comfort the widow. She spent the next six years devotedly nursing her husband, whose many health problems continued to worsen. Her love for Diana went on unabated, as she visited her in London 20 years later, spending her time, in the absence of servants, "scrubbing & cleaning & carrying trays up four flights." The elder Bill Patten died in 1960, and one of the first letters of condolence came from Joe Alsop, his school friend and roommate. And the third and last of the fathers-who-were-not-quite-fathers entered the younger Bill Patten's life.

Like Duff Cooper (and like Susan Mary), Joseph Wright Alsop V had an illustrious forebear, an addiction to power, a love of politics, the arts, and good living, and a desire to shine in the world. His maternal grandmother was a sister of Theodore Roosevelt, and as a young newspaperman in the Washington of the mid-1930s, he had been one of the few to be welcome both at the White House of cousins Franklin and Eleanor and at the mansion on Massachusetts Avenue where cousin Alice (Roosevelt Longworth) held court. After the war, he and his young brother Stewart joined forces in a widely read political column and he had emerged as a social, as well as a policy, arbiter, famous for the quality of the wine, food, and conversation served to a carefully chosen and powerful audience at his Georgetown residence. All he lacked

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was a hostess as refined as he was, and the death of his old friend presented a new opportunity. And so in a chapter coldly called "Nabbing My Mother" Patten describes a strange courtship that ended in a still stranger marriage, which nonetheless would last more than 12 years.

"Joe's improbable campaign to nab my mother began with his condolence letter after Bill's . . . death," the author informs us. "Within a month . . . he was writing regularly. He spent two weeks in France in May 1960. . . . it was the beginning of a nine-month campaign." Correctly, Bill ties this to the concurrent campaign of Joe's friend John F. Kennedy to get into the White House, which was one of the lures Alsop held out to his bride. Apparently to her surprise, Alsop also informed her he was homosexual and that the marriage would thus be platonic, but that the merger would open up to both parties new social vistas that neither could reach on his or her own. At first, Susan Mary rejected the offer, but time (and Kennedy's victory) may have altered her outlook. Bill Patten had died in March 1960; Kennedy won in November; and on February 19, 1961, Susan Mary married her husband's old friend. Soon after, Bill and his sister were moved into Joe's cinderblock mansion on Dumbarton Avenue in Georgetown, and the next phase in the story began.

Kennedy ended his first day as president by knocking on Alsop's door around two in the morning, a symbol of Joe's new importance in Washington, which would last something less than three years. There were visits of the Alsops to the White House for large and small dinners, and less frequent visits of the Kennedys to their house for dinners, including one in October 1962, at which Kennedy conducted talks with Russian experts during the Cuban missile crisis. After the White House itself, and the Robert Kennedy house in McLean, Virginia, the Alsop abode was the leading social attraction in Washington, the center for people of power and influence, where substance and style converged. Susan Mary and Joe were filling the roles once filled by Duff and Diana in postwar Paris, and in 1963, Diana came to Washington where she was introduced to the Kennedys at the Alsops, and then asked to dine at the White House itself. In the high days of Camelot, Patten recalls a lunch with Alice Longworth and Truman Capote "laughing mischievously about how President Kennedy had gotten their friend Marina Agnelli to swim nude with him in the White House pool." Other times they "joined the president and Jackie at the White House for a cozy Sunday evening dinner of fresh caviar and bottles of Dom Perignon." And then "they dined with the president and Jackie shortly before they left for Texas," where Jackie showed them the pink suit with blue piping she was planning to wear.

Duff and Lady Diana Cooper, 1944

DAVID E. SCHERMAN / TIME & LIFE PICTURES / GETTY IMAGES

After Texas, of course, everything changed. The world that Joe promised her began to unravel, and so did the marriage, as Joe—distraught at his loss and events in the world and the country—took out his frustrations on her. He became truculent, drunk, and often abusive: Dinners turned into ordeals and arguments, as he harangued guests, and often their hostess, on the errors of their opinions and ways. Susan Mary moved out and into the Watergate (and five years later, into her mother's big house in Georgetown) where, approaching 60, she began a new life as a writer, producing over the next few decades hundreds of essays and four books. This helped her reinstitute contact with Joe—now writing books in his own retirement—and the two resumed their former alliance, serving as co-hosts at each other's dinners, and going out as a couple. Always, she remained plugged-in and connected, befriending Nancy Reagan in the 1980s, leaving her son amazed at her power to adapt to sudden and social changes. When she died in 2004, Bill would be surprised at the extent to which she had become a Washington legend, of sorts; but by that time he had long left her orbit and dwelt in another world.

Bill Patten writes his memoir through the prism of things that he learned only later, and how this may have changed his impressions of what he remembered can never be known. What is certain, however, is that as soon as he could, he had begun to distance himself from the high-powered and glittering worlds of access and privilege his mother and "fathers" had relished and craved. Step by step, he began edging himself out of their universe: "Launched by Joe," as he put it, to enter his universe, he began his business life in the mid-1970s in a posh bank in Boston, wearing suits to the office and lunching in a Beacon Street club. But in another year he

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had taken a grittier job in real estate renovation, which led by degrees into moving to Maine. By 1977 he was living year 'round on an island and by 1979 was running a small weekly newspaper, locked into life in a small rural hamlet, a very long distance from Georgetown, or France. Doubtless his mother was mystified, but it was exactly the things that annoyed his mother that now appealed to him: "A friend . . . noted that I looked for what he called the 'rawness' in life," Patten tells us, saying he loved his neighbors' "rough honesty and lack of concern with appearance," which he found such a contrast to his mother's exquisite, mannered ménage.

On top of this, Joe's efforts to network on his behalf had been counterproductive: "Joe's intense supervision effectively helped undermine my own sense of career ambition. It was clear to me that I could not compete in the realm of giants that used to sit around Joe's garden room." What struck him as authentic looked to his mother like downward mobility, and he cites innumerable small instances that led him to believe, perhaps correctly, that she looked down upon him and his doings. Her friends were cabinet ministers in the British and American governments; his were small businessmen, teachers, and laborers who had never heard of Duff Cooper. He cringed when he visited his mother in Washington and she asked whom he wanted to see there—exposing that he knew, by her lights, no interesting or powerful people. Unlike Joe, he writes, she "made me feel like I had failed" by following paths other than those she had taken in life.

By her lights, however, it was soon to get worse. In 1994, he enrolled in a seminary, served for three years as the minister of a very small rural congregation, and from that moved on to an adjacent vocation: counseling violent men. He spends time now "in a state prison in Shirley . . . a maximum security prison [that] houses a large number of 'lifers,'" talking to society's outcasts who are guilty of terrible crimes. "It was a merciful thing that Joe was dead," he writes of his decision to enter the ministry, adding, "I didn't enroll in order to make him turn over in his grave nor consciously to make my mother uncomfortable," but there can be no doubt that it was an act of rejection. As he would write later:

> The straightforward talk of the men I work with in prisons satisfies some urge inside of me, some visceral response to the half-truths of my mother, and, to a lesser degree, of Joe.

It is a strange life for a son of Susan Mary Jay Patten Alsop (and of Duff Cooper), who was conceived in a great country house by a king's great-great-grandson, and had been brought up in Paris and Georgetown among (in the words of the Alsops' biographer Robert Merry) people who "took on the world." And it is a strange book he has written, too, for several things don't seem to add up. It would make sense for somebody gliding along easily in life to be shocked into rebellion by the Duff Cooper revelation, but he had begun his rebellion years earlier. It would make sense for someone who found out that he had a new, different father to find in that father's life solutions to things that had seemed inexplicable. But in this case, that just deepens the mystery: The younger Bill Patten makes more sense as the son of the gentle and quiet Bill Patten the elder than he does as the son of the restless and worldly Duff Cooper. The author seems also to conflate intrigue and deception with power-seeking and privilege. But many small towns have their secrets, too: He mentions that his plainspoken friends in Maine were indifferent to Duff because they resented his privilege; but Duff and Joe and, in her later years, Susan Mary, were hardworking, diligent people who might easily have risen on merit alone.

In her late seventies, Susan Mary developed a drinking problem and was packed off to a clinic, in the course of which her secret about her son's biological father would at last be forced out. En route to the plane, she had gone through her messages, which included calls from Mrs. Colin Powell and Mrs. Yitzhak Rabin. Her son notes this wryly, as if her real addiction had been to people in power, which he considers a fraudulent and unworthy enterprise. Better to tend one's own garden, he seems to be saying, than to aspire to power and changing the world. But of course, the world and the garden are not unconnected, and the motives of those who dwell in the world are not always vainglorious. And it is the Powells and Rabins of the world—not to say the Duff Coopers—who make it possible for the ministers, farmers, and part-time reformers to tend to their gardens in peace. ♦

Jacqueline Kennedy, front row left, Susan Mary Alsop, front row right, 1961

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B&A

Shark Attack

'Jaws' was boffo box office—and bad news for cinema.

BY JOHN PODHORETZ

The movie that changed Hollywood more than any other in its hundred-year history opened 35 years ago this week. *Jaws* was the second film made by a 28-year-old named Steven Spielberg. During the distended production period of his adaptation of Peter Benchley's enormous bestseller about a shark attack on a beach resort, Spielberg had reason to fear he might never work again. The design team had built a mechanical shark that malfunctioned; costs ballooned; everything that could go wrong did go wrong.

And yet this disaster-in-the-making turned into a triumph. By the time the summer of 1975 was over, *Jaws* had become the first film to make more than $100 million at the box office. That was the most consequential change *Jaws* effected in Hollywood: By making $100 million at the box office, *Jaws* taught Hollywood that a single movie could, in fact, *make* $100 million at the box office.

The temptation to reorient the business away from midsized pictures that would earn a steady stream of revenue along with a few breakout hits here and there proved too much to resist. Previously, Hollywood had been happy to hit for average, spraying singles and doubles around the field; after *Jaws* it began swinging for grand slams.

Jaws had been able to earn $100 million at the box office because it had been marketed differently from most ambitious movies before it. The pattern for general release had been to open high-prestige movies on a few screens nationwide—one or two in New York, one in Los Angeles, maybe one in Chicago. This was a demand-side model, in which marketers sought to exploit the scarcity of seats by creating huge crowds and lines and building up excitement through word of mouth. This was called "platforming," and it was the prestigious way to open a picture. It was also a hedge against disaster: If a movie bombed, a studio could decide against a wide release and spare itself the expense of striking hundreds of expensive prints.

By contrast, when studios had a picture in which they had less faith, they would often open it at multiple screens in the hopes that it would make its money in the first weekend before word got out that the movie was lousy. *Jaws* was the first supply-side motion picture. It opened at more than 400 theaters on its opening weekend, by far the largest number up to that time. It earned more than $7 million, or an average of $17,265 per screen—which would today be $70,000 per screen, nearly twice what *The Dark Knight* made when it opened to the largest-grossing weekend in history in 2008.

Jaws was also released on a Friday. For reasons lost in the mists of history, Hollywood chose to release its pictures earlier in the workweek, which meant that the excitement of attending a movie as soon as it opened would be somewhat dissipated when the weekend rolled around. *Jaws*'s Friday premiere made its first weekend a special event for teenagers, who flocked to it with an abandon that shocked Hollywood. It taught the business that the summer was actually the most profitable time to open a picture, and that was because the movie audience had changed.

And that, perhaps, was the most significant and enduring change introduced by *Jaws*. Over the course of the previous ten years, Hollywood had come to terms with the fact that baby boomers wanted different kinds of fare from the biblical epics and lumbering musicals it had supplied for two decades. They wanted frank, adult, more visceral fare: *Bonnie and Clyde* and *The Graduate* and *Easy Rider*, even out-of-nowhere exploitation movies like *Night of the Living Dead* and *Billy Jack*, and R-rated epics like *The Godfather* and *The Exorcist*.

Jaws marked the early end of the boomer era in Hollywood. Movie executives discovered that adults in their twenties and thirties were as nothing compared with teenage boys. Make a movie that would appeal to these boys, and you had a new kind of commodity on your hands. They would come back to see it over and over again. They would bring their friends. They would bring their girlfriends. They would bring their parents.

They treated movies they loved as though they were rollercoaster rides—worth standing in line for, and experiencing a second, third, or fifth time. They got exactly that feeling from *Jaws*, and it changed moviegoing for them as well. Indeed, the undeniable genius of Spielberg's direction was that he took material that others would have made into a horror movie and, instead, took his audience on an exhilarating ride, with amusing lulls punctuated by thrilling moments of terror, panic, and relieved laughter.

For 35 years now, Hollywood has sought above all else to stir that very feeling in the hearts of audiences. Producers, directors, writers, actors, everybody in Hollywood will happily shed most anything if they can produce even the faintest simulacrum of what Spielberg created back in 1975. Wit, sophistication, elegance, seriousness of purpose, honest sentimentality, and adult themes are all luxuries Hollywood feels it can no longer afford in its quest for the latest cinematic thrill ride. ♦

John Podhoretz, editor of Commentary, *is* THE WEEKLY STANDARD*'s movie critic.*

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"Insiders wonder about the future of Newsweek editor Jon Meacham if the magazine is sold to one prominent bidder, Christopher Ruddy of the right-wing media company Newsmax. Ruddy was known in the 1990s for his enthusiastic pursuit of conspiracy theories about then-President Clinton." **—News item**

PARODY

A NEW MAGAZINE FOR A CHANGING WORLD

by Jon Meacham

AP / TINA FINEBERG

YOU, THE READER, HAVE MADE MANY journeys with us. Yet now we ask something new of you. We ask that you join us in a conversation—a conversation about a journey—a journey, if you will, of conversations about journeys. The magazine you hold in your hands is our first small contribution to that conversation, our first small step on that journey.

Take a look around and we think you'll be surprised—pleasantly so. Readers have long savored the arguments of essayist Fareed Zakaria—"Reasoning as sharp as his stiletto heels," said one admirer at Bohemian Grove—and now they'll watch him take a giant lunge forward with this week's cover essay, "U.S. OUT OF THE U.N, U.N. OUT OF THE U.S." Zakaria's bold approach is matched and raised by our colleague Evan Thomas in his painstaking reexamination of the circumstances surrounding the mysterious death of Stanley Dunham, long thought by many—including President Obama himself, so he says—to be the grandfather of young Barry Obama. Some have looked into Dunham's murder and been seduced by the conventional view that he succumbed to natural causes in the quiet of a Honolulu hospital room in 1992.

At the new *NewsMaxWeek*, we are no longer satisfied with what "some" have "found." Thomas's retracing of Dunham's final hours includes the unexplained appearance of an enigmatic nurse—known only as Nurse X—who was glimpsed that night carrying a bedpan filled with an unidentified liquid. Head researcher Jonathan Alter did the shoe-leather reporting and discovered the bedpan was a model that was not used in Hawaii until 1995. Puzzling? Perhaps. Worthy of further investigation? We think so. Around this office we have a saying: "We Report. You Decide."

Who could inspire such risk-taking from the likes of Alter and Thomas and Zakaria? The cynic's answer: "Any asshole who writes them a fat enough check." Here at new *NewsMaxWeek* we recognize that cynicism is a sickness, eating at the vitals of the Republic. Our answer is simpler: "Mr. Christopher Ruddy." Publisher. Owner. Life Guide.

Earlier this year Ruddy looked at *Newsweek* and, as he so often has before, saw something that wasn't there. It was to make that idea a reality—to incarnate the dream, as Christianists say—that Ruddy first asked the staff to join him for dinner last month. Walking into Denny's, we were struck first by the sheer physicality of our new owner. The name indeed is the man, an extraordinary synonym for good health. Aside from a certain pastiness in skin tone. And a noticeable gynecomastia.

But then the talk began.

"Talk is cheap," said Lord Chesterfield. "Yada yada yada," agreed "Seinfeld's" Elaine. In conversation Ruddy's life force is truly unloosed. One hears in even his most casual remarks the echoes of Niebuhr, Calhoun, Gergen, Jefferson. To his charmed audience it seemed as though he were offering a week's worth of "Charlie Rose" before he could even finish the cheese fries. And lucky for us an uproarious sense of humor is included in this "ruddy" package. When staff clown Alter appeared dressed as a bootblack and began buffing Mr. Ruddy's loafers, the new boss placed an elegant heel on Jon's combover and sent him reeling into the busboys. Alter's subsequent imitation of a panting, frightened Bichon, attempted at Ruddy's suggestion, left us all reassured: Here is an owner with a gift for bringing out hidden talents.

"He hath given meat to them that fear him," the Psalmist sang, and he or she was, as always, prescient.

Now, Mr. President, about that birth certificate....

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